

# BOOK REVIEWS

THE SCHOOLS by Martin Mayer. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961. 446 pp. \$4.95.

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Is it possible for a layman to understand the diverse problems of the entire field of education? Numerous books written by lay critics suggest that this is not possible. However, if professional qualification depends primarily on *developed competence*, there is no reason why a layman cannot become a qualified critic of education—if he does his homework.

Martin Mayer's homework consisted of visits to "about a thousand classrooms" in public and private

schools throughout the United States, Britain, France, Denmark, Finland, and Norway. He also interviewed "some fifteen hundred people" in various phases of education and read professional literature extensively. Add to this that Mayer is unusually perceptive. His level of competence is, therefore, considerably higher than the previous national average for lay critics of education.

Through Mayer's eyes, the reader views some of the best and some of the worst examples of teaching in American and European classrooms. In a summary of the history of education, he rescues Progressivism from conventional folklore. There is an excursion through learning theory, concepts of intelligence, social class bias, tests and measurements, and teacher educa-

tion. As if this were not a grand enough scenic tour, the reader receives a kaleidoscopic view of school levels and of subjects—English, mathematics, foreign language, and social studies—which are of special interest to Mayer.

Mayer is a professional writer, and he uses his skills to reveal life, wit, and color in the educational scene. His method is largely anecdotal, and he presents classroom scenes as vignettes of educational drama.

Generally, this is a good book, particularly if one considers the difficulty of the study Meyer has undertaken and if one uses realistic standards for success in such an ambitious project. The quality, however, is uneven. About social studies he says at one point, "School is not really the place for questioning authority." But his chapter on teaching English, a field closer to his humanistic sympathies, is much more perceptive.



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