

Speech Day 1944

At the 23rd. Annual Speech Day day the prizes and certificates were presented by Miss Catherine Fletcher, Principal of Bingley Training College. Ald. A. Flavell, J.P., Chairman of the Governors, presided. The Chairman said the new Education Act had the seeds of a brighter and better world for all children. One good part was that from next April all fees for children attending grammar, secondary and technical schools would be abolished. The Act would create 70,000 additional teaching posts, and with this and the extension of many services throughout the nation there would be glorious opportunities for children to rise to positions of leadership. The West Riding County Council intended to build 55 new modern schools and reconstruct 42, build 4 new grammar schools and reconstruct 16, and build the first multilateral school in the county, which would be situated at Tadcaster. The Chairman said that old students in the Forces numbered 35 girls and 352 boys. Twenty-one had lost their lives, six since last Speech Day, and eight were prisoners of war. The audience stood in silence in sympathy with the relatives of the fallen.

Headmaster's Report

Mr. R. W. Hamilton devoted a good deal of his annual report to the importance of the School Certificate examination and criticised its proposed abolition. Remarking that the suggestion that the examination should be abolished would no doubt be popular with some pupils, he added that unfortunately for them the abolition was not to take place for at least seven years. "The School Certificate is not a perfect examination" he continued, "but it does one thing. It gives us a fair standard for comparing the abilities of our children. No matter what social prestige may accrue by attending a particular school, under our present system boys and girls all over Britain, rich or poor, in cities or villages, take a similar test and are graded according to their ability to pass that test. This is a great thing and should not be lightly cast aside. The present suggestion is that seven years from now the School Certificate should be abolished and that each school should set its own examinations. If this should come to pass, no longer will the pupils from the country village be able to claim equality with or superiority over the pupils from homes of wealth, for the pupil with wealthy parents is rarely to be found in the local grammar school. He is nearly always found in the school where wealth buys an education. The schools for the sons and daughters of wealthy parents have acquired a social prestige in the past, sometimes out of all proportion to the education provided. The names of some of these schools are known to nearly everybody in the country. Attendance at one of them gives added prestige to the pupils who attend them: whether rightly or wrongly is not at the moment the question at issue. The point is that through their superior social status, a leaving certificate from one of these schools will tend to have far more significance than one given by a local grammar school. Yet it is quite possible that the latter certificate is far more valuable. The trouble is that the world at large will not know it and will have no means of getting to know. Surely it is better to have one common measuring rod? Let all pupils, rich and poor, take the same or similar examination. There is much greater chance of justice for all in such circumstances. I know many of the arguments in favour of abolishing the School Certificate. With some of them I agree, but unless there are safeguards with which I am not familiar, it all boils down to the fact that wealth will eventually once again have precedence over brains. This we should not allow. If we want equality of opportunity, if we wish to see that no child is handicapped because his parents happen to be poor, we shall do all we can to prevent the abolition of the School Certificate. This does not mean the School Certificate is perfect. It needs alteration in a good many ways, but with all its faults and weaknesses it is better than no common measuring rod at all. It does, even in its present imperfect form, assure a modicum of justice to ability."

Mr. Hamilton stated that there were 591 pupils at the school compared with 513 a year ago. Two of the three rooms at Hemsworth Technical School were being used during the daytime. After a year of staff changes, last year was very quiet until June, when a real "blitz" started. By the end of July five teachers had left, and only two had been appointed in their places.

Six of the eight candidates for the Higher School Certificate were successful. Of 67 candidates for the School Certificate, 59 passed. Two State Bursaries in Science and a Junior Technological Scholarship had been won. He believed that education was much more than merely training children to pass examinations, and the staff prided themselves on the pre-eminence they gave to cultural activities. The spirit of service to the school was a feature of their life, and permeated everywhere.

After paying tribute to his staff and to the Governors, whose service he described as of inestimable value, Mr. Hamilton concluded, "Great changes are close at hand. For 23 years Hemsworth Grammar School has given yeoman service in the education of the children in the district. Last year we maintained our standard. The forthcoming year is big with possibilities. Educationally, dangerous and exciting days lie ahead. Amidst it all, our chief concern must be to see that our children's education does not suffer. So far as my staff and I are concerned, I can promise we shall continue faithfully to put the interests of our children before everything."

Presenting the awards, Miss Fletcher told the pupils that they needed three things if they were to have character and serve the world - co-operation, efficiency and integrity. People who did not possess the capacity to work with their fellows, do a job well, and be true to themselves could not help the world to be better. A good many problems would be solved if people pulled together and did well what they undertook, while those who took responsibility must ring true. They must be straightforward and honest with themselves. One of the greatest difficulties of some grown-up people was that they were afraid to be true to themselves; they got into such a lot of difficulties that they did not know how to get out of them.

Miss Fletcher was thanked by Mrs. E. L. Dooley, J.P., and County Coun. J. Potts, J.P. The presentation was followed by a musical programme by the scholars, under the direction of Miss E. W. Townsend.