

¶The famous English school.

THE SCHOOL WHERE DIPLOMATS ARE TRAINED

ETON in England seems to be a training ground for Britain's Foreign Secretaries. The number of Etonians who have held that important office easily exceeds the whole total from all other schools in England. Among them are such well-known names as Charles James Fox, George Canning, the Marquess of Salisbury, the Earl of Rosebery, the Earl of Balfour, the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, and, last but not least, of course, Mr. Anthony Eden. The "key" men who more than all others have recently been responsible for British foreign policy are all Etonians.

The fact is that it is the Eton system and not the mere accident of birth that gives Eton its predominance in the diplomatic world. Tradition, of course, has something to do with Eton's flair for diplomacy and politics. Families like the Cecils, for example, have been sending their sons to Eton for generations, and there have been, I think, five consecutive generations of Cecils who have either held the post of Secretary or Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs or both.

But far more important even than the Eton tradition is the Eton system. Eton, more probably than any other school, is run by the boys themselves with the masters to a surprising extent merely holding watching briefs. The result is to develop initiative, self-reliance, and an assured manner which are most useful in after years. The effect is seen in the fact that even in these democratic days there are no less than seven Etonians in the present Cabinet. Every sixth member of the present House of Commons is an Etonian. In India a short while ago not only the Viceroy but every single Provincial Governor had been educated at Eton.

Unlike most public schools, Eton has no dormitory system. From the day he arrives there the new boy has a room to himself, where he not only sleeps but does a good deal of his work. Apart from the ministrations of the "boy's maid," an elderly female who has the somewhat Herculean task of looking after some fourteen or fifteen young men of various ages between thirteen and eighteen, the Etonian's room is his own to make what he likes of.

It is traditional to have certain articles of furniture, such as a "burry" or bureau, which combines the duties of chest of drawers, bookshelf, and general repository for books. Nor would any Etonian be without his ottoman, which is not an ottoman at all but a small padded box. A table, washstand, and chair are provided by the authorities. But it is up to the boy himself to provide the rest, including the all-important pictures. The choice of these articles is not merely a training in self-respect: it is a lesson in self-expression. It is one of these intangible factors by which a boy unconsciously learns where his bent lies, by which is laid the foundation of the boy's individuality. And this is done, not at the end of the school career of a privileged few, as in most public schools, but at the very outset of the school life of every Etonian.

Houses in Eton are small—a good deal smaller than in most public schools. The average number of boys per house is forty. Throughout the twenty-eight houses there is a fundamental similarity of custom and system. Each House is not by any means a replica, but it takes its main characteristics from the same fountain head. Even its societies are moulded on those of the School as a whole. And beneath all this apparently hap-

azard similarity may be traced one essential characteristic: the aim to make not merely an educated man, but a trained and individualistic member of society.

That most famous of all school organizations—the Eton Society, more widely known perhaps as Pop—runs itself without interference from the Masters, perpetuates itself, admits and keeps out whom it will. Be it noted that birth has very little to do with election to Pop, and being a good mixer a very great deal. Here is another Eton characteristic which perhaps helps to explain why old Etonians play such a large part in public affairs. Etonians find their own level at school. They are not moved into position like pawns by the masters.

The roster of Eton societies does not, of course, end with Pop, even if it incontestably begins there. There are innumerable others—most of them, though by no means all—vaguely connected with some branch of scholastic activity. But their aim is not so much to promote scholastic efficiency as to develop a natural bent. There is, for instance, a Shakespearean Society, whose name speaks for itself, and a Caledonian Society whose less obvious *raison d'être* is the dancing of reels. There is also a Cercle Francais, a Musical Society, a Natural History Society

and—more intimately connected with the immediate object of this study, the Political Society.

The Political Society, like most Eton organizations, was started by a group of enterprising lads without any lead from above. Appropriately enough, the moving spirit in this case was one of Eton's future Foreign Secretaries, Lord Curzon. Its membership is limited to sixty and there is invariably keen competition for the honour of being elected. Again, like most Eton societies, the Political Society is ruled by a small committee of boys and whose hands the exclusive right of electing the common herd of members rests.

The Committee of the Political Society sets itself the task of getting together as many representative opinions as possible

into the Society, however unpopular they may be. It also sees to it that the net is cast both far and wide for speakers. Among the "fish" it has caught in the fairly recent past are the Duke of Windsor (when Prince of Wales), Mr. Gandhi, the late Lord Birkenhead, Sir Thomas Inskip, Mr. James Maxton, Lord Halifax and Lord De La Warr.

It is non-scholastic activities such as these that have put Eton so high in the political and diplomatic world. Eton is in fact not merely a school, but a miniature world with a cabinet, parliament, code of laws and organized social order all provided by the boys. Thus when they come to man's estate they have already had five years' training in the art of government.—*Godfrey Lias, condensed from Britannia and Eve.*