

colleges some 30 times. Yet, over the same period, the population of the United States increased only about threefold. The Harvard study also revealed that, while in 1870 about three in every four high-school graduates moved on to college, by 1940 three in every four high-school graduates were, in fact, being prepared not for life at college but for the college of life.

There are two important conclusions which, I think, we can draw from these figures. First, the explosion of education is only marginally related -- at least in the Western world -- to the growth of population. Second, the old aristocratic concept of education as being essentially for the few has been superseded by the concept of universal education. This is, of course, a natural evolution of concepts in a political environment which is itself dedicated to the enfranchisement of the individual as an informed and responsible member of a free and democratic society. Still, it is fair to suggest, I think, that the cumulative pace of that evolution has come as something of a surprise to all of us. It has certainly led to a situation in all our countries where serious thought is having to be given to the reallocation of resources in such a way as to accommodate more adequately the educational aspirations of our people.

One of the primary concerns of education is, of course, with the nature of knowledge. And one of the primary functions of knowledge, in turn, is to enable man to understand his environment. One reason, I am sure, why the pressure for more education has been growing at such an insistent pace is that the body of knowledge available to twentieth century man has expanded on a scale exceeding anything that the mind of preceding generations could have conceived. In respect of sheer competence, therefore, we simply need to know more today than we ever did before if we are to compete successfully in our particular sphere of life. The skill of man has devised techniques and produced machines that can be operated, in their turn, only by skilled men. Accordingly, if our people -- whether young or old -- are to be enabled to benefit from the opportunities which science and technology have opened up, they must acquire the skills and aptitudes that will allow them to do so.

Effect of Social Mobility

When I speak of new opportunities I cannot, in fairness, confine myself to the realm of science and technology. One of the great attributes of a democratic society is, surely, the opportunity it affords to all its citizens to advance according to merit. It is natural that this attribute of what we call social mobility should confer an entirely new value upon education. For it is essentially education that will enable a man to develop to the limit of his innate endowment and to assume in society the functions and responsibilities for which that endowment has fitted him.

I want to make it quite clear that, in this context, I am trying to deal with opportunity and not with opportunism. I am not essentially concerned with the pragmatic value of education as a vehicle for the status-seeker. What I am concerned with is the entirely new situation that was brought about when inherited status and inherited privilege ceased -- as they have over much of the Western world -- to be overriding factors in determining a man's position in society.