

THE OUTLOOK OF YOUTH

C. R. FAY

MY old tutor, Lowes Dickinson of King's, said to me last summer when I was in Cambridge again, "I find the young men of to-day clever and cultured, but disgusted with enthusiasms, and critical of persons and things". How far is this attitude a constant feature of youth at the age of twenty? How far is it a product of the war? How far is it a reaction to big changes in the philosophic outlook of educated men and the economic environment of people in general?

The young man of twenty is naturally critical, and it is well that he should be. For he has just left a public school in which loyalties are imposed upon him. The public schools of England are very like England's faithful mirror, the pages of *Punch*. On the surface and in their technique they move with the times, and would sooner be anything than out of date, but their undercurrent is strongly conservative and patriotic. The school-boy, like the humourist in his serious moments, dislikes grime and working-men, except in so far as it and they are heroic, as in the trenches or in an accident. There is no country but England, (Greece and Rome excepted) and the New World has an accent. The university takes these prejudices and refines them. England itself is criticised. It is vulgar to be a patriot. The working-man and the New World remain much what they were to his boyhood; but as the time for making a living draws nearer, a sneaking respect is felt for toil, and the New World becomes a place to be reckoned with and visited perhaps. Meanwhile new values are entering into his life—literature, art, music and the drama. All these he enjoys, if he has a mind. If he has muscle only, there is Twickenham, St. Andrews, and winter sport in Switzerland. In addition to these two groups, the scholars and the athletes, there is a great and growing third, the young scientist with his apparatus, limitations, and professional enthusiasm. The groups, of course, overlap. Not all the scholarship is with the classics; quite frequently Blues get Firsts; and there are students in the Natural Science Tripos who are fit to read in a school of *Litterae Humaniores*. On the whole the young men, I think, work harder, and care less, than we did a generation ago.

How far is such an attitude a product of the war? To gauge this, we must constantly remind ourselves that the undergraduate of to-day was a child of four or five when the war broke out. He must in his heart be very aware that he has grown up in a generation which was recovering from a terrific effort. What to us is back to pre-war is his first glimpse of equilibrium. Abnormal influences have played upon his youth. Although the wreckage of war has disappeared with a completeness which is startling, it is present by implication on every hand. The youth of twenty may remember but dimly the England of men and women that lived for a week's leave from France; yet since then he has moved about with seniors who clearly meant to have a good time, once or twice, before they died. Not having shared in the strain which explains, if it does not justify, this elderly abandon, he is disposed to accept it as a rule of life. *Carpe diem*. England is not selfish or sensual, but it is a country which takes now without fear, in a way repulsive to Victorian tradition, the pleasures that come its way. To the average man of the middle class, reconstruction was a getting back to the old sports and recreations in the intervals of making a living in a restless and heavily taxed land. To the youth, therefore, pleasure is just sensible. "Our fathers take it, and they won the war".

The greatest war loss was human. We are to-day *minus* the prime of one generation, the generation that should now be in the middle thirties. Men now nearing that decade skipped one of life's forms through premature vacancies in those above. This is an important cause of unemployment in industry to-day, for those who were killed or badly maimed were to an unusual degree the natural leaders of others, the men who could make others work by command and example. After ten years, material capital is present again to overflowing, but the way of using it in England is hard to find, because the workers have refused to work at a lower rate of real wages than pre-war, and there has been missing the leadership, experience and skill which could extract from industry the means of paying a rate as high and at the same time employing nearly all. France overcame this difficulty by the involuntary sacrifice of her *rentiers*. England did well by these, not for their own sake so much as for the economic benefits she rightly expected to receive from the maintenance of her financial prestige. Our youth, therefore, has lived in a curious economic atmosphere. Money has been hard to make in basic industry, but the profits of investment have been high, and the dispersion of profits by taxation or spending is rapid.

To a few, the shortage of men after the war brought exceptional opportunity. But this was shortlived, and the youth of 1922 to 1929 has learned much about the value of education, and more about the difficulty of finding a job commensurate with its cost. But even for the many this has had its compensations. For it has been the means of re-establishing what was the great strength of England over the centuries, the readiness to fare forth to other lands and find a living there. Soft jobs are few at home; the government services are constantly being "axed". The young man is not afraid of Nigeria or Malaya. He comes readily to Canada or the United States: hopeful, if somewhat suspicious, and at times exigent.

Some students find their stimulus in personality, others in movements, others in tasks, scientific or literary. Cambridge, like every other university of the Empire, has been short of personalities since the war. To give one simple proof, nearly one half of the history dons of fighting age were killed on active service. The old worthies have died off one by one. There have been too few candidates for the succession. Rather young and rather old have jostled side by side, rather young being absorbed in administration, and rather old being fussy or diffident according to their nature. And when rather young is really able, he tends to be in London a good part of his time. The teacher of middle life, with an unbroken record of academic service, is all too rare because of the war and the shifts which followed it; and this is the man whom disciples choose as master.

Of movements there is no lack. Cambridge pulsates with them. Societies, like sects, never die. The old persist, new are added to them, and a union between two generally leaves behind it a continuing dissentient. However, most social movements of to-day lack their 19th century appeal; for the horrors no longer exist which can be cured by exposure and campaign. The state is increasingly alive to its duties and, if it fails, does so not from ignorance of the facts but from inability to find the solution, or the money which the solution entails. Political interest on the other hand—that frail and rarely encouraged plant in the universities of North America—is active and real. Labour indeed has not made the headway in Cambridge that one expected after the Treaty of Versailles; one reason being the general strike of 1926, when trade unionism was in the wrong, and the university was mobilised to assist in its defeat. But it should forge ahead now that that it reigns at Westminster and Whitehall; and no authority in the university objects, or indeed ever has objected, to the expression of socialist opinion by teachers or undergraduates. The other

parties also are full of life. The Conservatives possess the representation of the university; the Liberals hold their summer school alternately at Oxford and Cambridge. The one is rich in post-prandial accomplishment, the other in purposeful brains. Political science flourishes as a study because a political career is the intention of not a few, and the university is regarded as a legitimate training ground for public life. Cambridge, like Oxford, is a home of intellectual freedom.

Can a task, scientific or literary, supply an ideal? A routine of work cannot, however well done; for under the examination system it is competitive and therefore selfish. It is valuable as a means, but sterile as an end. Graduate research is different; there the student is engaged in the quest after new knowledge, and the quest has the training quality of exploration. Research, however, is the occupation of the few; and student life finds its richest contacts in the informal clash of mind with mind within the college or the faculty. Young men wake up suddenly, but at different seasons, some at school, some at the university, some not until they earn their living. The variety of experience which a collegiate university provides gives to the awakening process the maximum of opportunity. One defect, however, is the shortness of the undergraduate life and of the academic year. If the means could be afforded, four years instead of three, with the last normally in B. A. standing, would greatly strengthen both the student's mind and his contribution to the current of intellectual life. And the Cambridge Easter term of six weeks, of which the last two are occupied with examinations and jollity, is a scandal and a fraud upon parents.

However, these are surface things beside the greater thing. What is the relation of education to the meaning of life? And this at least is clear. Philosophy, as a study, does not flourish at Cambridge. It is a failure in the sense that next to none take the Moral Sciences Tripos in which philosophy is formally studied. Philosophy may be taken also as an option in Part II of the Classical Tripos, but this is classical philosophy, and what is demanded is an exact knowledge of classical thought, and not analysis of the thought of to-day. The truth is that within the last twenty years in Cambridge, as elsewhere, there has been a silent but profound transformation in the balance of power. The mathematicians and physicists have now the first word, and are believed by some to have the last also. So long as philosophy was bound up with theology, it was possible for a cultured man to go far in philosophy by the aid of his culture, but such a man can say almost nothing about relativity or the atom. He has not the equipment to follow

the scientist behind the veil. Are we then to look to the scientist for our philosophy? Hardly, for he is primarily a scientist. He is absorbed in experiment and experimental facts. Their philosophic bearing is to him an incident. One reads Bertrand Russell's non-mathematical writings or goes to a public lecture on relativity by Professor Eddington; and one is disappointed. In trying to be popular they become superficial. Clearly they have said their big things in their technical treatises; their philosophy is an overflow which vanity or good nature forbids them to repress.

The educational problem which suggests itself is this. Could some of our good classics be taught at school sufficient mathematics and science to enable them later to follow science some way into its lairs? Far of course they could not go; for the mathematicians will tell you that they barely understand each other now, so specialised is their science becoming. But just as an economist who can handle the differential calculus possesses most of the mathematics which can be of service to him, so also, *it may be*, the classic, possessed of the foundations of mathematics, or of one or more natural sciences, would be able to use these as a key to modern philosophy. It is not to be forgotten that even at Cambridge nearly one half of the entrance scholars are still elected for classics; that in most public schools the best boys are drafted to the classical side; that a clever boy obtains the school certificate at the age of 15, after which he parts company with mathematics and natural science. There is no difficulty in justifying the classics as a training for administration or business or the law; for these are general vocations which possess no technique that is beyond an able general mind. But when our classical scholars stop short of Aristotle in their own Part II, or, if they switch to another Part II, take English, History, Economics—anything but Philosophy, one suspects that something is wrong. No one can accuse the Moral Sciences Tripos of not being comprehensive, as Philosophy has gone heretofore. But may it not be that it will never play again a dynamic part in the university's life until it essays to bridge the gulf between itself and natural science? May it not be that one day its central study will be a synthesis of the sciences? Some great teacher must arise who sees them as a whole and asks of them—where are you taking us, what is your highest common factor, what is the meaning of your method, why have we to talk your language in order to be philosophers nowadays? Such a one, perhaps, is already there.

But the teacher needs disciples. Could not the schools work out some way by which mathematics and science are not abandoned by their ablest boys at the age of 15? All will agree that the

ancient world produced masterpieces of literature and art which have never been surpassed, and that Greece produced in Plato one superlative genius, at once philosopher and artist. All too will agree that in archaeology and history, ancient and medieval, classical scholars have still a rich field to cultivate. But for those who are not thus inclined, three or more years of the classics are fruitful with possibility of waste—

The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
 From languages that want the living voice
 To carry meaning to the natural heart,
 To tell us what is passion, what is truth,
 What reason, what simplicity and sense.

It is easier far to talk about the teaching of philosophy than about philosophy itself. But one has to ask this at least. What is its relation to the meaning which life has for me as an educated man? And in answering I will keep to the first person, taking the risk that to a trained philosopher my speculation will be jejune. I am an idealist. I am moved partly from behind by the pressure of the youth that is in me. I look for the approbation of my fellows, though nervous of it, and in my clearer moments I follow my conscience. This prompts me to desire a state of mind which is noble or good, with action appropriate thereto. Though, on the score of pure reason, the case for the survival of the spirit in some way after bodily death seems to me as strong to-day as it was in the age of Plato, yet I cannot pretend to a lively sense either of a Divine Creator or of a Heaven Beyond. I yearn indeed after both these things, but they are not fundamental to the ordering of my life. It is very clear to me that religion and morality are separable and sometimes separate. In all high religions, indeed, the two are associated, but men may be good, and happy too, who are without religion in any distinctive meaning of that word. To say that their goodness is their religion is to close the issue by confusion of terms.

By goodness or nobility I mean such things as love, honesty, self-sacrifice, humour¹; in fact a catalogue of virtues with a common factor which I can explain only in terms of itself.

I see no moral value in truth, but only in truthfulness and the pursuit of truth. I desire truth as I desire beauty, but do not feel that either *per se* has moral value. If the truth of life were harsh or if the world were ugly, I cannot see why that should overthrow my morality. It would seem to me merely to call for greater effort, which would give greater scope for idealism. But believing in free will, I do not believe that the truth is unalterably harsh or

1. Mr. D. H. Lawrence's philosophy of the sexes—in man sex *plus* artistic creation, in woman sex alone—seems deficient in this particular virtue.

the world unalterably ugly. Fatalism, if I could be convinced of it, would be the one thing that would reduce me to moral dismay.

I conclude, therefore, that while there is a bond between my idealism and my philosophy, my idealism is not dependent on my philosophy. Indeed it could not be. For to me the core of philosophy is search after metaphysical truth which I do not expect to comprehend. This is where religion serves. It offers certitude by the avenue of faith, "authentic tidings of invisible things". It is a multiple of three things, discipline, worship and belief; and emotion adds mystery to it. I respect religion and sympathise with it, but I am not more religious than musical. I respect religion because I believe it is the banner under which many men fight who put spirit before matter; but being as it were faith-blind, my religion is only respectful hope. How far, I wonder greatly, is the apparent indifference of youth to great purposes the product of the dilemma in which I for one find myself? The spiritual banks of this our Erewhon are numerous and highly lauded, but the currency we deposit in them is the French franc. It does not seem to me to matter much that deep religious faith is the privilege of the few. What matters more is the difficulty of others in expressing the meaning of life without striking the Scylla of insincerity or the Charybdis of materialism. Therefore I seek in philosophy a pool of mental experience in which religion and non-religion, scientist and non-scientist, can make enthusiastic contact, each finding sustenance in the pursuit of truth which they can never fully attain, but which by the fact of common pursuit is rendered ennobling and worth while:

On poetry and geometric truth
And their high privilege of lasting life,
From all internal injury exempt,
I mused; upon these chiefly

But if a man be neither poet nor geometer, he must try to come at it by common talk.

This generation has witnessed an impact of mechanism on social and family life which is without precedent. In the 19th century machinery captured the workshop; now it is occupying the home, the city and the countryside. Young men say that they accept it as easily as night and day. They tinker an engine or drive a car as instinctively as they take in food or drink. They are not offended by noise, never having known silence. So they say. But I believe it is no more than their screen of defence, which it has cost them much in nervous energy to erect. Mechanism is not organism. It does not grow fruitfully. It merely sets

in motion an endless repetition. Mechanism and economics are close allies. The one is the technical, the other the tactical, process of modern society. It is highly important to study and understand economics, but fatal to become an economic man, either blatantly in the old fashion or in the trappings of a moralist. I have been thinking hitherto of Cambridge, but of Toronto I would say this. The economic man is more of a danger here. It is pitiable to see the way in which on this continent the mighty word *service* is degraded by commerce into an adjunct of salesmanship. For as industry is operated to-day, profit is its purpose and service its bye-product. *Pro tanto* it is "unethical" (to borrow from the vocabulary of Rotary); for in ethics service is the purpose and profit is the bye-product—the hire of which the labourer is worthy, and that alone.

But youth is ambitious, as well as critical of shams; and while some desire money for acquisition's sake, more desire it, at the outset at least, as a testimony to their efficiency and an avenue to power. It may be, therefore, that the characteristics apprehended in the youth of to-day, his indifference to big purpose and his surrender to money-making, are imposed upon him by his environment. If so, it is a conclusion of hope. For environment can be changed by institutions. As I see England, it is midway between India and Canada, between India with its fatalism, poverty and indifference to worldly gain, and Canada with its confidence, opportunities and reverence for financial power. England is tolerant of opinion and intolerant of manner. It is easier there to profess communism than to abstain from kneeling at the altar of good form, whereas in Canada communists are harried, and boys may go to school in fedora hats. The intolerance is gentleman's rudeness—the cult of those who have passed the peak of wealth, and are relying now on the loyalties of their class. I think it will lessen as industrial democracy grows throughout the land; for in the industrial democracy of co-operation, trade unionism, public ownership, international labour policy and the like, I see devices which among other things will do these two, make England richer than ever before, and class feeling the pleasant joke that a peer is to the Canadian newspaperman. Young men the world over have this in common, that they prefer not to look foolish. When power is with the group and not with the individual, they will work for the group and the wealth of the group; and social service will mean not the salvaging of the wreckage of capitalism, but the humane control of liberated life. And here, surely, if nowhere else, is a big purpose for the youth of to-morrow.