

## To the Young Men of Western Canada

Prof. W. F. Osborne, University of Manitoba

### Let Bygones be Bygones

One of the grand secrets of success is concentration. So many of us let the past weigh on us with a heavy hand. Yesterday is always wanting to take its toll from to-day. It will inevitably take a certain toll. There is no use of our consciously aiding it in the process. If we have succeeded, we like to gloat over the fact, and over the details of the fact. If we have failed it is hard to resist the temptation to mourn and whine and analyze. We should put the whole of ourselves into the present task. We should live all the time with the sum total of our force. A man needs a certain recklessness to make things go. A certain abandon is the secret of vitality. A man like Roosevelt is what he is because he is so amazingly vital. I once stood in a narrow corridor in the Waldorf Hotel through which he passed. The air tingled as he swept along. The reason was that he is so full of zest. He is still a boy and pitches himself into the job of the moment with a boy's keenness. Let us remain boys in this respect. Don't be worrying all the time as to whether what you are about to do or say is precisely consistent with what you have said or done before. Emerson says that "Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds." The key is to be true to yourself, and the past and the future will take care of themselves. Polonius, giving advice to Laertes his son, says: "To thine own self be true." A life lived in fidelity to oneself will draw into a consistency and uniformity superior to that which can be attained by prim, anxious nursing of ourselves.

### People in Glass Houses

We often blame the peoples of Europe for acquiescing in militarism. The Germans, in particular, we blame for putting up so tamely with the brutal domination of a military class. We carry this so far that, when we see them practically united in support of the war, we conclude that they are hand in glove with their rulers, and in effect as guilty as they. We feel in the same way about the peoples of countries like Roumania and Greece. The popular feeling was supposed to be all our way. Why did they not give effect to their desire? Why did Roumania not join the Allies long before she did? In the days when Venizelos was out of power, but tremendously popular, and general Greek sentiment was preponderantly pro-British and pro-French, we wondered why the people did not do what everybody said most of them wanted to do.

But let us try on ourselves this cap that we adjust so cavalierly to the heads of others. Does the Canadian people easily manage to have its will carried out? The country is overwhelmingly in favor of a national government which shall put an end to partizanship, at least for the duration of the war. That has been the preponderant desire of the people since a very early period in the war. And yet, at the time these words are written, we have after a long effort just now achieved our purpose. Suppose a foreign observer has been studying carefully during these months our Canadian newspapers. Would he not rightly conclude that there was an overwhelming demand for the formation of a government representing all the major interests of the nation without regard to party? And, seeing that we were not getting it, might he not easily conclude that, as a people, we are marked by some strange incapacity? In other words, he might, not very unreasonably, mete out to us just about the same sort of judgment that we at one time and another have passed on European peoples.

Then another thing comes to my mind as I write this, which I think tends in the same direction, or bears on the same point. On certain subjects public opinion tends strongly in certain directions. Under these circumstances this same public opinion is apt to become extremely repressive. I am struck by the fact that, in private conversation, strong and able men are constantly expressing opinions that run directly counter to the views that are publicly in the ascendant. These views are virtually never voiced in public. Why? The men that hold them are afraid—that's all. I meet men in Winnipeg who hold extremely decisive opinions. This very week I have met different men who have said things so violently counter to general opinion as these, for example: That there cannot be any permanent organization of the world on a peace basis until a world court is set up that will pass in review the title by which all the nations hold possessions outside their own boundaries; that the policy of Protestant Canada with regard to the education of Catholic citizens has been a complete failure, and that we should have been farther ahead if we had let Catholics have public money freely for the maintenance of schools conducted in accordance with their special views; that even Great Britain has not stated with sufficient clearness the objects for which she is fighting in this war. These views, of course, have nothing to do

with each other. They deal with different subjects, and I am giving them simply as illustrations. There is not one of them which, openly avowed, would not send to Coventry the man who would make himself responsible for it. The result is, they are never heard in public.

When we think of these things we should not be disposed to charge with quiet docility the people of militaristic countries. All that a man has to fear here, for the most part, is the penalization of opinion. There if an individual protested he would be imprisoned. And if large numbers protested, there would probably be a proclamation of martial law, and the ones responsible for the protest would be shot. That realization, and the knowledge of the way we ourselves act, should make us chary about the judgments we pass on other peoples.

### Wrongly Directed Criticism

Father Drummond, a brilliant and accomplished Jesuit preacher, long resident in Saint Boniface, now at Edmonton, some time ago spoke almost sneeringly of the Russian revolution. Father Drummond in doing this was aiming his darts at the wrong people. For one thing, I should like to know how authentic his information is that nearly forty thousand persons lost their lives in the first few days of the revolution. Those figures have certainly not become general property.

But suppose they were true. Suppose even worse excesses are yet committed. Who are to blame, primarily? Not the gigantic and childlike people of Russia, just emerging, and violently, from their swaddling clothes; but rather the czarism and bureaucracy—the former hopelessly reactionary, and the latter hopelessly corrupt—that for so long repressed and defrauded and brutalized the people. I read the other day a significant sentence, written by a Frenchman, Albert Lorel. He says, in effect, that the fires of revolution are not chargeable to the unfortunate people who commit them so much as the excesses of the bad old systems, that these same people have to rise to destroy. Read Young's *Travels in France*, see the conditions obtaining among the French peasantry prior to the revolution; and then ask yourself whether it is any wonder there was a reign of terror. Think of the obscuration, the venality, the treachery of the old regime in Russia, and ask yourself whether it is much wonder that blood had to flow. The excesses of popular revolutions are the penalty of vicious and tyrannical governments. There is no rose water way of getting rid of a hoary octopus like the former government of Russia. The system that persists in repressing one hundred and sixty million people has itself to blame if, in the long run, it is removed with violence. The real friends of society are those who, in advance of catastrophe, try to mediate between classes in the effort to achieve by evolutionary process what, denied that method, will ultimately express itself in revolution.

### Results of German Education

I have recently read as a whole a book of which I had read parts before. I refer to the famous book on Germany written by Madame de Staël and published in England in 1813. She tried to publish it in France in 1810, but the myrmidons of Napoleon suppressed it, and she had to flee from the country.

One certainly has difficulty in recognizing in the Germans of 1917 the successors of the Germans of a century ago. Then they were disunited, subjective, timid, lacking in executive capacity—dreamers, poets, philosophers. To-day they are welded into a compact machine, aggressive, masterful, ruthless. The change that has been wrought in this people in a century and less, should teach us how mighty a force nationally conceived education is. The German people has been transformed because a persistent national propaganda has been carried on among them.

Let us ask ourselves in Canada to what extent our education is making us as a nation what we want to be. Have we a goal? What is it? Have we a conception of national character? What, in turn, is it? Are we proceeding, or simply drifting? The signs are, indeed, that we have not even had before us a program of national unity. We are to-day a divided people. English Canada has never bestirred itself to interpret itself to French Canada. We have left Quebec lying by itself. We have left the whole field of ideas in that province to men like Bourassa. The result is that when a testing time of the first magnitude, like this war, comes, the reactions on the situation of the two large elements of Canada are totally dissimilar. English Canada leaps to the side of Britain and France; Quebec hangs back sullenly. English Canada says Canada must be defended where the foe is; French Canada says all that we are responsible for is the soil of this country, as such. English Canada recognizes that the whole in-

terest of democracy is at stake; French Canada says: Nonsense, this war is the natural outcome of the imbroglio of European ambitions, and, anyway, we are not much interested in democracy. These differences point to a profound schism. They indicate that we must do some thinking before even unity will be achieved. And after that is accomplished, the whole superstructure of national achievement has yet to be reared. But, at any rate, the German example proves that where there is a will there is a way. That is, where there is a national will there is a national way.

A concrete reference comes to my mind here. There was a discussion in the house at Ottawa during the recent session with respect to the allocation of about \$40,000 for the purposes of scientific research. If I remember rightly, it had to do with the establishment of fellowships to maintain students who had shown special aptitude in practical scientific investigation. The need is obvious. Canada abounds in vast natural resources. Our own young men should be utilized by the nation to disclose to us the extent and character of these resources. A man who has been a federal minister sharply challenged this vote. Virtually he saw no utility in it. The time is surely past for conditions of this sort in the Canadian parliament. Education should be conceived and utilized in a national sense; it should be regarded as the chief instrumentality for conducting us along a clearly marked, because deeply considered, pathway.

### Possibilities of Conversation

Conversation is an art from which not many of us extract the potentialities of which it is capable. The French, indeed, are almost the only people who regularly regard conversation as an art at all. Conversation might be made one of the great instruments for the development of the minds, tastes and interests of children. How much the table talk of families might be improved! I could imagine the table conversation of a household so conducted that, for one thing, the management of children at meal time would cease to be a problem. And, for another, that the results for the development of information and general culture would be most considerable. "You can tell a young man who has been reared in a household where the reading of standard books has been the rule." Similarly it is not hard to recognize the man or woman bred in an atmosphere where conversation has been made to turn on things worth while.

A large part of ordinary conversation deals with persons. There are certain men who can scarcely talk about anything but such-and-such people. This sort of thing is dangerous. For one thing it is a sign of sterility and poverty. For another it almost inevitably degenerates into gossip or scandal. I think it would not be a bad rule virtually to eliminate the personal element from conversation. I know this could not be done completely.

Thomas DeQuincey, the opium-eater, has a couple of interesting essays on the Art of Conversation. One very interesting thing, in particular, he points out, viz., that conversation may become an engine for the origination of totally new material. Two men meet and talk. The ordinary view would be that the result must simply be the addition of the resources of one to the resources of the other. So that the total stock of ideas is not at all changed by the encounter. But DeQuincey points out that something else may happen. When two minds come in contact, a sort of chemical fusion and interfusion occurs. The two together may produce a result, in the form of ideas, of which neither had before dreamed, and of which neither, alone, was capable.

Conversation, conducted as an art, has sometimes achieved very considerable things. "It was practically the spring and basis of the brilliant literature of France in the seventeenth century. A certain noble lady, the Marchioness of Rambouillet, was dissatisfied with the atmosphere surrounding her daughters in the rough court of Henry IV. For the sake of her daughters she embarked on an ambitious plan. She rebuilt her town house in Paris with a view to entertaining on a large scale. She instituted regular receptions by which she invited all the accomplished men and women of the time. Conversation was staged on a grand scale. French society became a society of conversationalists. Wits were sharpened, grossness was abolished, books were read in manuscript, plays were rehearsed, intellectual competitions were instituted, talent was evoked; and an ineffaceable mark was placed on French society and French literature. This is merely an illustration on a grand scale of what uses may be made of conversation. The most characteristic product of the French genius is the classical literature of the seventeenth century; and it is not too much to say that that literature had its point of departure and its standards fixed in the conversations of the society that foregathered in those and similar receptions.