

# The Age of Mediocrity

Many names have been given the age we live in, the Machine Age, the Age of Science, the Atomic Age, but in truth may we not call it the Age of Mediocrity.

It is not a century characterized by diligent striving for personal perfection in all spheres of life. Rather, it is a time of appalling indifference and disregard for personal perfection. "All things now are to be learned at once, not first one thing than the other, not one well, but many badly. Learning is to be without exertion, without attention, without toil, without advance, without finishing."

We are ever ready to defend our right to "individualism," our freedom to express, both in the spoken and written word our personal opinions, to vote as we please. Yet, are we truly expressing our own feelings and ideas and not the stale cant of the mob. Have we continued to value our individually, thus escaping the smothering tenacles of the self-complacent majority. Has our norm of conduct become that of the majority, and public opinion, our criterion of good, or do we cling tenaciously to our own convictions in spite of humiliation and perhaps social expulsion. I believe in giving up our personal convictions and accepting the beliefs, actions and thinking of the dominant majority we have obliterated our individuality and are becoming mediocre.

With the rapid technological growth of the 18th and 19th cen-

tury we have strived to become specialists in all types of endeavor. That science, industry, education have made prodigious advances in the last century is indisputable. Yet through this limiting of endeavours the individual has become subservient to the complex society he has created. Personal identity is obliterated in the labyrinth of modern living. One writer sums up over specialization in this manner, "men, whose minds are possessed with some one subject, take exaggerated views of its importance, are feverish in the pursuit of it, make it the measure of things which are utterly foreign to it, and are feverish in the pursuit of it, make it the measure of things which which utterly foreign to it, and happens to fail them."

Man is now content for perfection in a limited field of endeavour. Thing foreign to his particular pursuit hold little meaning for him and thus he does not devote to them the time and effort which they deserve.

Through the medium of the press, radio, books, and moving pictures manners expose to the overwhelming forces of stereotyped thinking.

Through constant exposure to mass communication man often releases his grip on individuality and accepts the mode of conduct and thinking of the mind. He does not seek perfection as an end in itself, but rather adheres to the tenets of the masses, for fear of ridicule or social expulsion.

Knowledge is no longer such as an end in itself. Utility has become the only goal of education. If we are obliged to pursue a particular study, which appears to be of no use at the present we are content to do only the minimum amount of work. So in any field of human endeavor, if the toil involved appears to the mind of the immature not to be of utility it is shunned like a putrid leper.

That we live in a complex and technical age is indisputable. In limiting our scope of learning we must not limit our striving for perfection. If the majority are willing to seek only the minimum form a university education, we must not be satisfied to do likewise.

Man is not subservient to the state or society. He is not a mere embroidery on the complex social factor, he is the fabric itself. He has the power to lift man out of his present pit of paths or follow the slothful mediocrity and oblivion. Man can perfect himself only if he believes perfection is superior to mediocrity and is worth striving for as an end in itself.

In 1820, at the laying of the cornerstone of Dalhousie College, the Earl of Dalhousie had some pertinent advice to give future students of indifference and mediocrity. "From this college may every blessing flow over your country. May it continue to disperse them to the latest ages. Let not jealously disturb its pace, let not lukewarm indifference check its growth."

# The King's Column

By Dave Millar

ACT 1, SCENE 1:

(The scene is the porch in front of Sherriff Hall; the time, five to twelve. The rain and fog part to show us a King's man at the door, saying goodnight to a Dal femme.)

D: "You haven't told me about King's College. What's it like, anyway?"

K: "Originally (to begin at the beginning) I think it was at Windsor, but later it was moved to a spot down by the Arm here in Halifax. The building there burned down, and the building I'm living in now was built on the Studley Campus. That's how Dal and King's were affiliated. D: But they have separate Students' Council, don't they?"

K: Yes, King's has a rep on the Dal Council, though, and it's been paying money each year so that the King's students can enter Dal activities. I hear there's quite a controversy over it now—Dal doesn't want it any more. D: Say, how did the parts of the buildings down there get their names?"

K: I told you about the building on the Arm—well, there the different faculties lived in different bays and special names were given each bay. Radical Bay for the theologs—King's isn't all Divinity by any means, though; Middle Bay because it's in the middle, Chapel Bay—nearest the Chapel, the farthest away now, North Pole Bay because it was on the north, farthest from the furnace (it's right over it now), and the names stuck. The Women's Residence, Alexandra Hall was named after Queen Alexandra. The "Bays" may be a hangover (joke, you know these sailors) from the Navigation School that was here during the war.

D: Isn't there a big cave or something down there? Professor Bennet called it the Cloaca Maxima.

K: There's a tunnel that connects all the parts of the building—very handy for winter and initiations, but it's only resemblance to a sewer is during water fights.

D: Oh! You have those too?

K: Do we ever!

D: What kinds of sports do you play?

K: Well, I'm on the rugby team—we've played three games so far, and the girls' ground hockey team has played two. Later on there'll be basketball, hockey and track, etcetera.

D: Great merciful heavens! Look at the time; Miss Mowat will skin me alive. Good night!

K: Good night!

"By the Way"

# "Cornerstones"

By Alan Marshall

We live in a very self-conscious age. "For the first time in history": this phrase is so scattered through modern life that it is impossible to avoid stumbling over it. We feel ourselves to be part of a historical process. An important event is never allowed to happen naturally: everybody ohs and ahs says, as Ogden Nash puts it:

"We are lucky to be on the spot

At a moment," he says, "so momentous . . ."

It wasn't always like that. The traditional picture of the Congress of Vienna shows a casual group of men standing around as though they were having afternoon tea, while some are draped across chairs and sofas. These men had to draw the map of Europe after Napoleon had torn through it. Nowadays? Well, I remember seeing a picture of one of our post war conferences (in the days when we had more hope in conferences). Men were putting the delegates' portfolios on the desks, before the session was to begin; and to put them in position, they stretched a string across the row of desks and lined up the portfolios on it! This was an important event, you see; and everything had to be just so.

Why we insist on preparing for big events as big events, instead of concentrating on the job to be done, and discovering afterwards what was important and what was not, I don't know. Perhaps the work of archaeologists and historians, exasperated with the carelessness with which earlier generations allowed great events to slip through their fingers (and therefore be inadequately recorded), has made the modern age more sophisticated about history in the making. There may be more significant reasons.

Perhaps, in a world as secular, as "worldly" as ours, the events in our lives have assumed greater importance to us than they did in an age when people had unworldly worries as well as worldly ones. So historical events press on us more relentlessly than in the past. People are more the prisoners of the times than they used to be, and find standing against the stream more difficult. That may be why we see the world as historical drama with ourselves as players. Our audience? Well, if we are all players, then future generations form the audience. From this view, comes the necessity of seeing that our doings are adequately recorded, so that we can reach our audience. The opinions of future generations are the ones that count. Contemporary opinion is far too uncertain and unchangeable for us to place much confidence in it. The historians of the future stand over us as judges.

Nothing more clearly illustrates the attitude that we are playing a part in a historical drama before future generations than our custom of laying cornerstones. The cornerstones are set in the buildings as part of our effort to insure that later men shall know what we have done. And so, preparations for the days when buildings shall fall into ruins are made before they are even built. The architect assists future generations in their search for the twentieth century by putting bits of into cornerstones. I doubt if anything in earlier architecture quite matches this self-conscious effort of our times. The closest resemblance seems to be the pyramids of Egypt, in which the bodies of kings were preserved along with their possessions and records of their acts. Indeed, the discovery of Egyptian tombs may well have had a hand in encouraging men to appeal directly to their successors in works of stone. The Egyptians however were not moved by a desire to assist later men to learn about them. Indeed, they sealed their tombs as tightly as possible to prevent anybody from getting in. They were moved by the importance their religion attached to keeping their bodies intact, and their possessions with them for use in their future life.

Nor have I heard of appeals to the future in later architecture. I don't think that they put cornerstones in the Greek temples, nor in the Roman public buildings. Nor were they set in the Romanesque and Gothic churches. It is, in fact, one of the greatest glories of Medieval architecture that much of its greatest work was done by men who had no hope of future recognition save in the work to which they had given their labor anonymously: a far cry from the cornerstone appeal to posterity. No, I think that they are comparatively recent.

There are several cornerstones on the Dalhousie campus. The most unobtrusive is that of the National Research Council Building: a simple stone like the rest, with 1949 carved on it. Those in the Law, Library and Science buildings are great long blocks of gray sandstone, telling who laid them, and the date. That of the Science building was laid by the Duke of Connaught, who was the Governor General of Canada at the time. By the way, the caretakers have very carefully kept the ivy off these cornerstones, even though they have covered the walls in which the stones are set. The Sherriff Hall stone is granite, and the letters carved in it are lined with a sort of gilt. This stone was laid by the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VIII, and now Duke of Windsor. When he laid the stone, the building was not ready for it so the stone had to be laid somewhere else instead, until the Hall was built up enough to put the stone in it.

The stones in the Arts buildings and the Rink are black, and they have a very high polish. On the Arts and Administration stone we find:

This stone was laid

by  
J. McG. Stewart  
C.B.E., K.C., B.A., LL.B., D.C.L.  
November XV, MCMXLIX.

He was the Vice-president of the Board of Governors and Chairman of the Dalhousie Campaign Committee when the stone was laid. In line with the cornerstone tradition, an appeal to the future generations has been placed in a box inside it. There are several Dalhousie publications: the Calendars, regular and graduate (what will they think of Dalhousie education?), the Alumni News and the Dalhousie Review. A whole copy of the Dalhousie Gazette unfortunately was not included; but an article from it was put in: a description of the mace of the university. Two booklets

(Continued on Page Three)

# A Polite Letter to a Christian

Dear Sir:

For the Christian who suggests that the man who does not believe in a life after death therefore cannot believe in God, I should like to point out a few things. Firstly, I have never in my life met a man who did not believe in God; and secondly the person who has decided there is no after life has by that same God given reason opined emphatically that there is a God.

And furthermore a man need not be a Christian to be a devout and God-wondering man. I have in my travels around the world met Moslem, Hindoo, Jew, agnostic and humanist who did not believe in Christianity as the road to enlightenment yet who lived more ethically perfect and morally good lives than, I regret to say, more than 99% of the Christians I have ever met.

When you say that someone has probably never met any true Christians he is absolutely right, and when I meet a true follower of Christ and not a banal follower of dogma and indoctrination I shall probably be so taken with Christianity that I shall then plead to profess a Christian ideal.

As far as the fact of an after life is concerned I should like to point out that while it cannot ever be proven as such not being; I am assured also that no one ever has or ever will satisfactorily prove beyond a reasonable doubt that there is. The argument against the great fallacy is too extensive to be included here, as is the arguments for the possibility of an after life.

However as food for contemplation for the writer of the Christian letter I would like to ask one question: "When does this after life begin?" one minute after the heart stops, five minutes after we are dead, or is it twenty minutes after, when the body cells start to disintegrate? I declare that there have been thousands who have seemed dead from drowning who have been revived, hundreds ready for the tomb from electric shock who have been brought back, and on the operating table how many doctors have massaged the heart of a recently dead patient only to bring him back to life? Of course you will say they were not dead; but had they been under your discretion you would

have merely shovelled them under.

But the big question is: how many of those dead one minute, two minutes or twenty minutes ever were able to tell of even one glimpse of heaven, hell or purgatory when they were with us again?

Frankly none of them were, because they knew nothing, no feeling, no consciousness, no awareness, just nothing. And that's just what is in store for all of us.

Yes life after death is a very pleasant and comforting thought; very contenting, but what contented man ever accomplished anything?

And that it where the trouble lies, everyone is so sure of a beautiful reward that after 20,000 years of civilization, 10,000 years of Oriental religion, 5,000 years of Judaism, and 2,000 years of Christianity we still cannot get along together in the world because everyone is so busy trying to get into Elysium that they have not the time to live on earth as God planned it should be.

—S.O.S.

## WUSC Thanks

The WUSC Committee very much appreciated the interest shown by the "Treasure Van of India" last week. People were very generous in assisting with the organization of this project. In particular the committee wishes to thank Dr. Kerr, Prof. Bennett and Prof. Theakston for allowing us the use of room 21 in the Arts Building; Pat McCurdy for coverage in the papers; the boys of Pine Hill, the girls who made the posters and acted as sales girls, and the Commerce Society.



**"EXPORT"**  
CANADA'S FINEST  
CIGARETTE

## Camera Club

The Dalhousie Camera Club will have its second meeting on Monday, Nov. 2, at 8 p.m. in the basement of the Men's Residence.

At this proposed meeting, the officers who will serve the club for this year will be elected. If you have a genuine interest in photography, do come and make the meeting a success. We have planned a field trip and the finishing touches will be put to the program for the period.

The University of British Columbia's Camera Club has invited us to submit entries in their salon competition, open to both black and white and color pictures. Come to the meeting and decide at once if you wish to participate in the competition—so that we may inform the UBC.



**TO UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES**

Financial assistance to help with University expenses can be secured by undergraduates in either of these two plans:

**ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE**  
University Plans

<b>U. R. T. P.</b> (University Reserve Training Plan)	<b>R. O. T. P.</b> (Regular Officer Training Plan)
--	---

There are openings for  
**AIR CREW OFFICERS, TECHNICAL LIST OFFICERS**  
and **NON-TECHNICAL LIST OFFICERS**

Take advantage of this opportunity now, while you are still attending University. For full information on requirements, pay and other benefits, SEE YOUR RCAF RESIDENT STAFF OFFICER.

F/L L. H. SAUNDERS  
with offices in Dalhousie Gymnasium

CAF-15-53



**THE Best**

**Neilson's JERSEY MILK CHOCOLATE**

**MILK CHOCOLATE MADE**

531U