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To Be Young Today

TO BE YOUNG TODAY is not only to enjoy many advantages and comforts unknown to former generations but to suffer many trials and to cope with many problems which did not plague our forefathers. Young people are genuinely puzzled by the frictions and deficiencies in our society.

Impatience comes naturally to the young. They resent the bureaucratic time lapse between pressing the button and getting an answer to their questions or action on their requests for change.

Young people have a consuming passion to make wheels turn, to go somewhere. Discontent with things as they are is not wrong in itself. It is the impetus which has created most of the greatness in men and women in all of history. But discontent which looks only at burdens to demonstrate against and not at blessings to use is unhealthy. Both burdens and blessings are part of normal life. The great scientists, historians and philosophers agree that life on this earth has been and is one continuous, never-ceasing process of readjustment.

Young people know that they are maturing in body and mind at an earlier age than did preceding generations, and they want to have that fact acknowledged. Their demand to be heard reaches into every nation, and within the nations into universities and schools and families.

Young people in Canada are not, by and large, the frothy characters depicted in the comic strips. When a number of wholesome young people gather, the topics on their agenda are justice, economic stability, social development, peace, education, and the role of government in providing opportunity to citizens at home and aid to people abroad. They seek ways in which they can participate in national, provincial, community, church and school life. They want justice tempered with mercy, erudition mixed with understanding, and authority qualified by humanity.

If they show an original point of view and a highly sensitive appreciation of human values, these are not qualities to be condemned. If they have a feeling for those who live outside the benefits of abundance and for those who have less liberty than they have, that is

merely giving expression to the highest ethics taught by all the great religions.

It is the legitimate aim of young people to make the future so attractive that older people will wish they were going to be there.

Most young people handle the requirements of life and its pressures adequately. Their urge is to seize the passing hour and fill it with experiments.

However, there is no percentage in living only the immediate present, in believing that something that has just happened, or is happening, is for that reason overwhelmingly interesting. How tiring it is, and how disappointing, to have our lives become a medley of ill-assorted impulses and adaptations to transient interests.

In lauding our age as one in which we have machines that think, let us be mindful of the fact that human beings must think harder to keep ahead. The highest purpose of society is not to prepare a nation fit for computers, and this is one of the central points in the protest of youth. They see the world around them becoming captivated by electronic mechanisms, and they fear that they, too, may become slaves of the machine. They seek a profounder meaning to life and a more satisfying culture. The society in which they wish to live would be eminently civilized, made up of men and women delighting to use their minds, loving beauty and elegance, keenly alive to the amenities and joys of life. They want poets and philosophers as well as engineers.

This is not to say that invention is looked upon disdainfully. There would be no bath-rooms, automobiles, flying machines, or protection against diphtheria and polio, if certain students had not studied practical sciences. The standard of living enjoyed in Canada today depends upon scientific and industrial research; but our culture and our happiness depend upon our keeping a reasonable standard of human ideals and values.

Independence

For almost every young person, adolescence means one thing above all else: he must prove that he is no

longer a child. He is fighting to establish himself as a person.

The words "freedom" and "right" have vivid meaning for young people. They think in terms of Pistol's boast in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: "The world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open." This self-assurance is diminished when they find that even adults, free as they are thought to be, are limited by law and custom and conscience, but, fortunately for the human race, the urge is not eradicated. It survives in the determination not to be crippled by a sterile conformity.

To experience independence a youth must become aware of himself in depth, and this requires conscious deliberation. The best and most that a person can do is put into practice what he understands, and nature has ordained a certain sequence in these things which we do well to follow: the sequence of beginning with what is nearest and then working our way step by step to what is farthest.

Seek significance

Before deciding upon a course of action, prowl the environment. Make a discriminating response when challenged to do this and that or to support one side or the other. To follow the whims of shifting interest and desire is to indulge in substitution of means for purposes, something called idolatry in religion, absurdity in logic, and folly in morals.

When choice is to be made of a course of action or a deed, choose that which has significance. Every youth is forced to answer the question in dialogue with himself: "What are the things that I ultimately value?" He must answer with the thought in mind: "I will have to live with myself all my life, and what I decide now will influence my happiness."

In thinking things over, we can find some hints in the past. When people quote Shakespeare or Socrates or any other of the admittedly great persons in history, it does not mean that they are bowing out of this century. It does mean that they are taking into account the wisdom of the past as a possible key to this century's problems or as a guide to their solution. Look at the remnants of cities and temples uncovered by archaeologists in many parts of the world. Men who could build had been there. Many laboured up the dark pathway behind us and died often without realizing their ambitions so that we might stand today on a pinnacle from which we catch new visions.

While putting to use the experiences of the past we need to be careful to make the most of our own experiences. He is a fortunate student who grasps early the opportunities afforded him for personal observation, because wisdom comes from meditating on experience and assimilating it.

The store of knowledge gained through study and experience is helpful when we try to interpret the answers to new questions. The mother of a five-year-

old girl said: "Lisa's questions are very bright and searching. The trouble is that she can't understand any of the answers." The child's experience library is not yet big enough.

Maturity

Dissatisfaction with what is around us is not a bad thing if it prompts us to seek betterment, but the best sort of dissatisfaction in the long run is self-dissatisfaction which leads us to improve ourselves. Maturity implies the ability to walk alone and not be ashamed within ourselves of the things we do and say.

Progress in maturity may be measured by our acceptance of increased self-responsibility and an increased sagacity in decision-making. This transition is not a time of calm enjoyment, but of growth and adaptation.

One matures as a person by responding differently today from the ways in which one responded yesterday. We observe restraint so that restraints do not have to be imposed upon us; we do our best to think clearly so that we avoid chasing after false doctrines; we use deliberation so as to see through nonsense; we realize our social duty to tolerate the honest opinions of others while maintaining our own principles.

Maturity is not something you can gate-crash. You have to enter it legitimately, sustained by an appreciation of inner and outer reality. You need to be like the centurion in the Bible, a man who could both take orders and give them.

This is a mark of character. People talk about building character or personality, but how is it done? Every impulse acted upon, every resolution carried out, every fine emotion that gets us somewhere, is weaving itself into the pattern of our character. This is not the product of lectures or sermons, but of well-directed individual effort.

Character takes in the whole man. A man may be a bonny fighter, but a false knight. The test is: to like and dislike what one ought. Perhaps character is summed up in the sentences which Plato tells us were inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi: "Know Thyself . . . Nothing in Excess."

This involves self-discipline, and self-discipline sometimes means doing things we would rather not do. Samuel Taylor Coleridge said that all his life he had hated soldiers and horses, and "the sooner I cure myself of that the better." So he enlisted as a private in the 15th Light Dragoons, and disciplined himself there for four months.

Blind alleys

The searcher for maturity should not allow himself to be led into blind alleys. Discerning thought will protect him against the woolly speculation in which a youth imagines himself a hero who will put salt on the tail of the millennium.

When a course of action shows itself to be unprofitable, it is sensible and valorous to drop it.

There is no personal value in making a show of maturity if you do not have it. Affectation of any sort borders on vulgarity, and at the least it is ridiculous to pretend to feelings and beliefs that do not appeal to your intelligence.

On the other hand, no mature person will be content to sit by the side of the road and watch the world go by. One cannot be merely a bystander, doing nothing but criticize. As a Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police put it: "He is the kibitzer on the game of life and I say to him, if you want to have any part in telling us how this game should be run, put some chips in the middle of the table or shut up."

When a human being finds himself at a dead end, he is tempted to turn to that last desperate resource of muddled mankind: lawlessness. He does not realize the unprofitableness in delinquency and the low standard of living to which it condemns him. He may even imagine himself a martyr in some trivial or irrelevant cause. His hooliganism brings discredit to the peaceful, legitimate and often courageous protests by young people on great moral issues.

Society is indulgent toward young people, but there are limits to permissibility. Youth is right to repudiate sham and hypocrisy, but to assume that disorder and chaos have merit in themselves is to assume that we are no longer capable of reasoning together in search of the right solution of problems.

Values in life

Much is heard about defending our way of life and making it secure for the future, but the immediate question for everyone is: "Am I making the most of what life offers me now?" After all, mankind did not reach its present superior status in the evolution of species without finding values during the process. Men developed consciousness, enabling them to discriminate the qualities of things.

From where we are today we can push up toward superiority. That is behind every human creation, every contribution to the better life. To be successfully what we are today, and to become what we are capable of becoming: that is true ambition.

There is room for fastidiousness in our lives. We need standards of values if we are to know what events and what purposes are meaningful to us, so that we avoid substituting secondary aims for primary values.

By being particular we can resolve the clash between what the crowd clamours for and what we ourselves interpret as being valuable to us. We can avoid the imaginary conflicts and the false confrontations cooked up by crafty people to further their purposes.

Consider the instance of the supposed opposition between idealism and realism, with which some try to bemuse us, as if you cannot have clear ideas of how

things ought to be and at the same time see perfectly well how they actually are. All of us have thoughts about what is true, what is beautiful and what is good, and we all desire these qualities, but that does not stop us from seeing and regretting the untrue, the ugly and the bad.

One of the most valuable things we enjoy is being able to contribute. As we cross the line between teens and twenties we are entering the human enterprise in a significant way. We are beginning to realize ourselves as part of the human community, and to find satisfaction in paying our way. When we think a little more deeply we uncover a new and greater satisfaction, because we become identified with eternal relationships, things that are beyond ourselves.

There is something futile about the life of a young person who is satisfied to fill immediate needs and meet immediate demands . . . it is like the life of some low type of organism which adapts itself without conscious thought to its surroundings.

Pursue excellence

Most young people have strong desires. They are not content to live a mere miscellany, however pleasurable it may be. They dream beyond the actual and think beyond their finger-tips. In doing so they are living up to the great law of culture, that a man should become all that he is created capable of being.

Think of the example of Pablo Casals, the small town boy who became world famous as a musician. At four he sang Gregorian chants in the parish church, at six he studied the piano and the organ and wrote music, at seven he began to study the violin, at eleven he took up the cello . . . and so on, step by step, until at ninety, just a few months ago, he conducted performances of three major symphonies, the recordings of which are giving world-wide pleasure.

All that is expected of you — but it *is* expected of you — is that you will make the best use of the things that are within your power. An old man in one of Ibsen's plays had only one talent, the making of pie-dishes, and only one ambition, to make a really good pie-dish before he died. Not everyone has the fingers for manipulating a potter's wheel, or the sort of mind that enjoys technical things, or the ear for music, or the eye for painting. Every person needs to seek the kind of profession or craft he is fit to do enjoyably.

Beyond success in things learned and known there is, as the maker of pie-dishes knew, something better: it is excellence. One may be successful in the eyes of the world without touching the Golden Fleece of excellence. The young men and the young women in pursuit of excellence will want to have their elbows free, not to be caught up in crowds where their course is dictated by rabble enthusiasms governed by emotion, and limited by short views.

Does society today give youth the encouragement to aspire and the chance to reach this high peak?

Young people feel that opportunity to express themselves in thought and work has not increased relatively to the increase in their efficiency of body and mind.

Research people are convinced that early development of children's bodies is matched by a collateral early development of their minds. Dr. J. W. B. Douglas, director for 22 years of one of the widest ranging studies of human development yet made, believes that this advantage is maintained in later years. But our society has not geared itself to providing the opportunity to put these capabilities into action, and this is one of the short-comings that young people are asking society to correct.

Merely having ability is, of course, no reserved ticket to achievement. Doing what there is to do inevitably increases the percentage favourably, and this involves use of a four-letter word that there is no disgrace in using: "work". The greatest disservice done to our age is the denial of necessary connection between effort and reward. Work is not only an economic necessity and a social obligation, but a basic human right and a means of personal fulfilment.

The adult sphere

This is not only a time for those in their teens and twenties to be young: it is a time for all ages to be youthful in outlook and spirit. In fact, to be young in spirit is not only a pleasant prospect but a demanding necessity.

The most common form of maladjustment among older people is being too rigid to deal readily with the demands of changing situations brought about by the sheer fact that one grows older day by day in a world that does not stay the same from day to day.

What it is imperative to recognize is that there has been a deep and wide change in young people's attitudes. The worst sin is to be indifferent.

This does not mean being indulgent. Adults can still challenge the naive belief of some young people in their notion of decentralized decision-making; point out that eccentricity in dress and discourtesy in manner do not give evidence of independence; and that flying off balance in support of some remote or ephemeral or inconsequential cause is not a sign of maturity.

At the same time adults should admit that they have been neglectful about their duty to keep up with the times; that they have not succeeded in practising all that they have preached; that they have been indulgent in the way of making life too easy and discipline too slack. Both sides have habits and thoughts that need adjustment, and they can reach that adjustment through dialogue.

Give understanding

Parents in Canada make a tremendous effort, often at great personal deprivation, to put their children

through school and university. The distressing feature is that they have not kept up with the education they are providing for their children — not technical knowledge, but knowledge about the children's beliefs, desires and mental processes.

It is harmful not to look at the needs of young people steadily, clearly, and without pink glasses. Life is not and should not be a fleecy cloud for young people to loll on. They need to develop backbone and courage if they are to handle their lives well.

If parents abdicate their responsibility to instruct their children in these qualities they are giving up their right to receive the affection and devotion that are the prize and crown of parenthood. Their children, disappointed in them and bewildered in a world for which they have not been prepared, will drift away in spirit if not in fact.

There are few gifts that one person can give to another in this world as rich as understanding. Adults need to give meaningful answers to questions asked by young people, or admit that they do not know but will try to find out. Sympathetic patience is called for. Parents have seen all the horses and coaches on the merry-go-round many times, but this is the first time round for their children.

Adults should help young people to give expression to their ideas, however far-fetched these may appear. By involving youth in the game instead of having it sit on the side-lines, adults can channel criticism into constructive contributions.

For their part in this dialogue, young people need to remember that there is a way of presenting one's views considerately, no matter how revolutionary they are. A good advertiser does not speak his own language but the language of the prospective customer. Stamping your feet is not the best way to win agreement. It solves nothing to be regressive, to revert to the reactions of a child. If you seek sympathetic consideration of your wants you need to give evidence of your willingness to understand when things are made clear.

Play the game well

Animals below the rank of man are passive in the hands of evolution, but man, with his higher power to think and assess and plan, can take hold of his own evolutionary process and direct it toward happiness-enhancing ends.

If we look back over the past five thousand years we may realize that, from our point of view, all that has happened has been provisional and preparatory. The ball has been passed to us.

The notion that youth wants out of the game is fallacious. Young people want most of all to be involved. They don't want to start their own game, but to participate in the great game of living and to bear active responsibility for whatever score is chalked up. They seek from adults the workable guidelines that will enable them to play the game well.