



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

MONTHLY LETTER

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, MAY 1951

IMPERATIVE NEEDS OF YOUTH

YOUTH need not picture its age as a slender, breathless and rather frantic interlude between childhood and maturity. Youths leaving school and university this year have not reached some place that is an end, a finality. They are too old for some things, it is true, but they are no longer too young for others — that is all.

On school-closing day, every graduating boy and girl has a date with history. It is a date which ushers in the significant period toward which their life so far has been an approach. Now, their preparings come to fruition.

Everyone enters this stirring period with the beginnings already laid of what is to be his personality. He has already begun to assemble qualities that make him what he is as distinct from other persons. His future depends upon how he welds these traits and elements of personality into something which is stronger than personality — character.

No one will wish to embark upon this second stage of the voyage through life without a chart which will guide him to the harbour of his choice. He needs to decide what he wants and to count the cost. The very act of planning in this way will develop in him something that employers of today find to be the greatest lack in workers: sense of responsibility. Thinking clearly on his own problems will prepare him to analyse, to plan and to master situations. These are attributes which make a man valuable.

The young men and the young women starting out from school this year will wish to formulate a set of general principles by which to set their life course. Only they can set that course, but we can offer a few suggestions. The youth who graduates this year must recognize:

The need for continuing education;

That living democratically is the most satisfying form of society;

That freedom is an indivisible thing: everyone must be free;

That he is part of society;

That broadened intellectual activity depends upon the give-and-take, the communication, of ideas;

That everything he hears is not necessarily true: he must sift the evidence;

That he must discipline himself to meet difficulties, unpleasantness, discomfort, frustration and hardship, and keep his colours flying;

That he needs a spiritual guerdon;

That his greatest material satisfactions will arise from achievement through work.

Some of these were expressed in his *Meditations* by the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus more than 1,750 years ago: "I learned endurance of labour, and to want little, and to work with my own hands, and not to meddle with other people's affairs, and not to be ready to listen to slander, and not to busy myself with trifling things, and to endure freedom of speech, and to become intimate with philosophy."

Everyone wants Success

Like education, success is not a finality. Every step is a beginning. It resides in the striving as well as in the attainment.

No preparation, no planning and no strategy can guarantee success; one can only deserve it. But if one has fun trying, and finds his happiness along the road, then it doesn't matter if the journey ever ends.

We can go further. Thomas J. Watson, who created the International Business Machines Corporation, put it this way: "The minute we say to ourselves that we have succeeded, we have confessed failure. A man who is doing his best each day is truly alive, but a man who did his best yesterday is starting to die."

We may give two hints about success. Do not allow yourself to be put off an endeavour in which you thoroughly believe yourself capable of succeeding just because some people tell you it is impossible. Don't

forget that at one time all the world, including its greatest planners and savants, thought it to be impossible that the earth should be round, or that there could ever be a horseless carriage, or that man could travel faster than the speed of sound.

The second hint is: never say to anyone about anything that matters "I don't know." Say, instead, "That's an interesting question: I'll find out." This is an attitude that has enabled men of only mediocre education and qualities to succeed. It demonstrates an eagerness to serve — and in so serving it adds to one's knowledge.

Ambition May be Good

We cannot speak of success without mentioning ambition, and we would divide ambition into two kinds: simply good and bad. The latter can be dismissed in a moment by telling an anecdote about Caesar. When he was passing through a wretched hamlet in Switzerland one of his friends was speculating as to whether rivalry and ambition agitated the hearts of such impoverished people. Caesar replied: "I had rather be the first man in such a village as this than the second man in Rome."

The good ambition arises out of our creativeness. We want to express in music, in poetry, in writing, in painting, or in craftsmanship, our ability to conceive and produce something notable, or at least worth while. So long as we keep that sense of purpose, ambition is healthy.

Prudence has its place in ambition, as well as impulsiveness, and while it is not always wise to wait, it is well to cultivate the ability to wait if it should become desirable. Besides advising us to think before leaping, prudence tells us to keep in sight both the near and distant. A high goal should not blind us to immediate needs.

We are reminded of the philosopher who, while gazing at the stars, fell into a pond. If he had looked where he was stepping he might have seen the stars in the water, but he could not see the water in the stars. Brought down to terms of the youth starting work this year, the moral seems to be: do your best on the job you have, while sizing up the jobs ahead and preparing yourself to fill them.

Within reason, and if it is the right kind, ambition is a good and a healthy thing. It should be founded upon a specific, concrete and definite aim. William James tells in *Psychology* about the hunter in the Adirondacks who shot a bear by aiming, not at his eye or heart, but "at him generally." We should not aim "generally" at successful living, but should select targets one by one, and reduce them piecemeal.

Choice of Work

Little-by-little is, in fact, practically the only way we can tackle life today. We are hobbled by uncertainties not of our making, and over every hill is a new unknown country. Education, knowledge and intellectual skill contribute to our help, but we still must use careful judgment.

We are all likely to boast of what we are going to do sometime in future. The thing to boast about, really, is how much energy we are in the habit of using effectively to accomplish things worth doing. Make no mistake about this: performance is needed. The man who never shoots cannot carry off the marksman's prize; he who slinks away from a battle cannot be a hero; nor can he who comforts himself with paper plans ever achieve success.

No titanic exuberance will carry today's youths through the extraordinary world experiences they are embarked upon. They need will power and fidelity to purpose. Those who succeed will be the men and women who, in the most effective manner open to them, go about getting things done. They will not miss, and they will not be missed by, the sceptics who are busy scorning work in their infantile debates about obscure utopias.

It is, of course, well to press on toward some utopian ideal, but with a sense of long-range cause and effect. There are more instances in nature of transition than of abruptness. He who has a chance to work gradually to his objective is likely to compromise his victory if he seeks to hasten it by indulging in wide-ranging forays that are foreign to nature.

Next to trying too desperately is the fault of not trying at all. Even the doctrines of leisure and recreation so commonplace a few years ago are taking on a new look in these times. We are learning that the goal of life is not idleness but achievement. So don't be a faddist on short working hours. It is nice to have abundant leisure, but history is at bottom the story of great men who worked late.

With much less time than modern jobs allow, men in the past and present have achieved the most remarkable works on record. Spinoza ground lenses all day, but in the evening wrote one of the major works of philosophy. Mr. Churchill, we dare say, has been a pretty busy man, but he found time to make himself a painter whose work is respected, and a major writer. The late Lord Keynes worked himself literally to death in public duties, and yet became an authority on the ballet and theatre.

On Reaching Decisions

These people chose what they should do with certain criteria in mind. They did not accept maxims from the past or snap judgments in the present. They tested ideas for their worth to them. It is wise, always, to question closely statements that affect our lives. Do not, for example, accept this Monthly Letter without asking yourself the truth of its reasoning — not your friend's truth, not the "truth" handed down in often contradictory proverbs, but the ultimate truth of what it says as applied to your personal case.

That is just common sense. Someone has said that horse sense is little more than the ability to say "no" to the things that do not count in making one's way. It includes, also, the quality of saying "yes" meaningly to things that do count.

But you can't do either effectively until you have an idea of what counts and what does not. This involves knowledge of your personal capacity, your tastes and ambitions, the demands of the career you want and your ability to meet them.

To reach a great decision requires intellectual integrity, the suppression of wishful thinking, and the strictest regard for the truthfulness of evidence. Some of these requirements can be assured of being met if some such device as the following is adopted:

1. State your problem or your ambition — write it down for greater clarity.
2. What are the choices? Write them all down, silly though some may appear.
3. What are the virtues and faults of each? Here is where you must be honourable with yourself and honest to facts.
4. After you write this far, some of the choices will automatically eliminate themselves.
5. Out of what are left, what is the best solution (a) for you today, and (b) for you and your family (or your family-to-be) in future?

Take into account in making choices what is involved in the matter proposed, what defeat means, what success signifies, your weaknesses and your powers.

Reading and Thinking

In everything that has been mentioned in this Letter as desirable, we can draw upon all the ages for counsel. If we want to find out what success is, what happiness and contentment are, it would be well to ascertain what other thinkers have thought success, happiness and contentment to be. A little library will bring to any of us the problems, discoveries, successes and failures of history. Those now-dead authors are living and breathing in their writings, and their words speak clearly today to all rational men.

Wide reading will help us to keep our balance in a world that is becoming increasingly specialized in narrow grooves. It will help us to think clearly, and to express ourselves meaningfully.

These are days when our culture is in some confusion, and there are no ready-made answers. Our minds are likely to get so printed over with slogans, rallying cries, and spatterings of this and that ideology that we feel incapable of simple and straight-line reasoning. The situations that confront us every day have more triangles and sharp points than Euclid.

Our young Canadians need heads that can think wisely, and hearts that can feel warmly. What goes on in their heads and in their hearts is more important in determining Canada's future than what goes on in our laboratories and factories.

They must be able to get along with one another. Even worldly success, if gained at the expense of goodwill, is bought too dearly. Co-operation and affability

have commercial value, as well as personal satisfaction value. In business, the man of good disposition, doing his work gladly, learning eagerly, has a thousand chances to get on, where the sour-looking, gloomy, discontented, "waiting for pay day" kind of person has barely one.

Win by Persuasion

It was when men ceased to be individualists solely, and came to recognize that they had interests in common, that society came into existence. The wise man of today tries to win his way by persuasion rather than by throwing his weight around, and able men fight only when fighting is beyond doubt the one best way to control a situation. They do not cause friction by raising issues that are not worthy, for that sort of thing does not repay the fretfulness of dispute.

Another word for co-operation is participation. A life in which everyone holds his home as his castle and refrains from interfering with others is a community in a negative sense only. Democracy is fraternity and co-operation for the common good. When union is stressed to the exclusion of freedom we fall into totalitarianism, but when freedom is stressed exclusively we fall into chaos.

We are both one and many: both a people following the same road to a joint future, and a set of individuals following scattered roads as our personal gifts and circumstances dictate. The Harvard Committee reported in *General Education in a Free Society*: "The quality of alert and aggressive individualism is essential to good citizenship, and the good society consists of individuals who are independent in outlook and think for themselves while also willing to subordinate their individual good to the common good."

There are two significant contributions being made toward building in Canada a nation wherein enlightened people may abide in peace and dignity. The first is being made by the church, which invites men and women to a mature relationship with life. The religious life, in this sense, is one in which there is a constant effort to link oneself, in joy and contribution, to all ennobling movements in our world.

The second contribution is being made by admission of youths as participants in adult activities of school, church and community. This is, as yet, a puny effort compared with what is required, but it is proving effective in some places. Mrs. W. H. Clark, Secretary of the Joint Planning Commission of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, put it this way: "Youth needs to have a part, even though a small one, in the decisions which control his life. The opinion of youth should be sought and respected on all councils and deliberating bodies, public or private, which touch on matters that concern youth."

It is not necessary for adults to embarrass themselves in such meetings between the ages by trying to talk youth's language. What is needed is to ascertain their thoughts. First of all, listen; then understand. Adults of today cannot search back in their own youth to arrive at decisions affecting young people today,

because the whole environment of life has changed. They can, however, season the thoughts of youth with all the wisdom they have gathered along their many years.

Failure to bring about this co-operation of youths and adults would have ominous results. Never since the first high priest made sacrifices under a Stone Age moon have we been more plagued by witch doctors with their crooked counsels. Never before has such an onslaught been made upon the minds of youth, to turn them to fanatical gospels, to scepticism of all that the world has found worthy, and to unbelief.

The Good Life

The Greek philosopher Aristotle gave a famous definition of society: "The State *originates* in the need for subsistence; it *continues* through the wish for the good life." Canada, and many other countries, have passed the stage of being joined together solely to wrest a living from the soil. We know that Canada's welfare is not to be built upon science, industry or politics, but on goodness and wisdom.

We have three institutions that contribute mightily to maturing us in these virtues: the church, the school, and the home. The primary shaping of character takes place in family life, where the child grows from stage to stage of confidence, skill, affection, responsibility and understanding. Then the child learns the rudiments of social life in school, where he associates with scores of other children of many creeds and from environments that differ from his. In the church, he is taught that not all his efforts can lift a man higher than the level of humanity; that only by setting his gaze God-ward can he rise.

The Good Life is not the idle life of a beachcomber who subsists on the bounty, the left-overs and the wrecks of others. It is a strenuous life of responsibility. Life has no savour for the good man unless he makes it consist in service. If one service is completed, he grows restless and invents some new standard, more difficult.

Freedom and Co-operation

An important ingredient of the Good Life is its freedom. We have to be ready, in these days, to defend our country and to help the free nations of the world defend theirs, but our defence must be more than physical. We must equally uphold the ideas and practices of freedom. The country that loses these, whatever name it may bear of republic or democracy or commonwealth, may as well content itself to living in servility. The loss of freedom means the loss of the right to think, and without thinking man ceases to be man.

What it all adds up to for today's youth is that they must go on. This is not even a resting place, but only a transfer to slightly new environment.

Youths and adults must go on together, growing in mental and moral and spiritual stature. It is not enough

to be literate, we must harness literacy to ideals and to a sense of the first rate. If we wish to carve images from clouds this year and twenty years from now, we must have the tools, adapted to the spirit and requirements of the age, with which to work.

We need to learn constantly, but more than that we need to relate what we learn to the realities of experience and practice. This means that education in our adult life will consist as much of unlearning and re-learning as of tackling new subjects. If we don't do it we shall walk into future years like a blindfolded person walking into a familiar room where someone has moved the furniture.

Toward a Better World

Our vast programmes of economic and military mobilization cannot fail to affect the outlook of youth. We must try, while preparing to fight if necessary for what we believe is needful to our happiness in life, not to lose in that preoccupation the very basis of the thing we are fighting for.

It is appropriate, in days like these, to reflect with C.S. Lewis that a consistent practice of virtue by the human race even for ten years would fill the earth from pole to pole with peace, plenty, health, merriment, and heartease. That is a dream hardly to be realized, but we can, under whatever circumstances of strain and uncertainty, cultivate the basic ethical values of democracy — devotion to equality, individual worth, intellectual freedom, political liberty, democratic processes and general welfare, and we can broaden down into everyday use the high moral principles of the great religions. Our Shangri-La is not a spot on a map, but something in the spirits of men.

"It is all very well to talk in these sweeping words," some may say, "but let us cultivate our garden." That is good advice. We must, first of all, cultivate our garden. But it may be for our good, as well as that of our neighbours, to co-operate in a spot of irrigation, or in getting together to improve our minds, or in signing a memorandum to the authorities about the need for a new school.

The freedom and happiness of mankind depend upon how free men of goodwill conduct themselves in the present crisis. Young people of today have the capacity to build new and tranquil cities of freedom, and to erect loftier and happier towers of achievement.

Some may be shying away from the truth that the future depends on them. But there are enough others for us to be sure that today's passing turmoil in our affairs shall not end in endless chaos, and that the liberty of men's minds shall not be fettered by evil and cruel men.

These are embarking on adult life with spirits capable of endurance, high ideals and rich achievement. Theirs is a challenging and a noble prospect.