

THESE ENGLISH

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SINCE you arrived last week you have had many to welcome you. The Director, the Wardens, the Matrons, their helpers, and various of your lecturers have already welcomed you, and tonight the Mayor and the Bishop have spoken to you. Now it is my turn. My greeting, the last, is cordial. For the College values the Summer Course. Ever since the Course began, August has been a red-letter month. Our academic year has had no undertaking of greater personal and political interest. It is moreover a pioneer undertaking. Its founder was a former professor in the College, a prophet and example of inter-nationalism: born a German, naturalized an Englishman, married to a Scotswoman, and Professor of French—Professor Schopp.

The members of this Course are the immediate successors of the party who met here in August, 1939. They dispersed to their homes in anxiety and alarm under the thundercloud of war. The storm broke on Europe in anguish and disasters and unutterable wrongs. I shall not linger on the war years. You are old enough to remember them. You and we now enjoy some of the blessings of peace, though hardly peace in its fullness. Great earthquakes often conclude in a menacing diminuendo, the rumble of disturbance as Mother Earth settles to slumber again in her wide bed. The world, as a measure of peace, and the hope of more. It has better reasons, on the whole, for contentment than for fear.

You have come here to study the English language and English life. Your interest in us flatters us. We think very well of our language, when we happen to think of it at all. We speak it quite well, those of us who take the trouble. Some of us think the best English is spoken around Inverness in the extreme north of Scotland, far from England. Let that encourage all of you. There is much to be said for learning English as a foreign language. The English are apt to take their language for granted. They take many things for granted, which frees their minds for other things. We think particularly well of our language for foreigners: it is easy for them to learn, and convenient for us that they should learn it. As for English life, action, policy, society, we think very well of them, when we are not decrying them. It is characteristic of the English

*Inaugural Address of the Summer Course for Foreigners, 1947, by the Principal of University College of the South West, Exeter, England.

to doubt and condemn themselves. They call it "grouching". It cements the nation wonderfully. The English seldom come so close to each other, heart to heart, as when they look earnestly at the black side of their affairs. Pain unites them more than joy, though there may be some unreality in the pain. The world being as it is, a nation that trusts to joy for its cohesion may find itself outdistanced by the English. The English, let me assure you, are a difficult and fascinating study. In general they are shy, and in expressing themselves unready. Their intelligence is strong, but instinct is their choice. They prefer to live, work, and associate by instinct, and to use intelligence as a means towards establishing instincts. The processes of their reasoning are hard to observe: they happened hundreds of years ago, perhaps, and can only be inferred now from the instinctive results. The entrusting of so much to instinct frees their minds astonishingly for occasions that require teamwork and resolution. Since they depend more on instinct than on intelligence, they are critical of education. For an active nation they are lazy. They are great sleepers.

Have you ever considered why so many strangers settle in England? They come on a visit or a holiday, or on a course, they begin to study the English, an inexhaustible subject, they continue the study, they apply to the Government for naturalization in order to complete the study. But they die first, though not without finding out some things, e.g., the English contradictions. The English can take in without giving out: their minds have immense stowage-room, the contents of which they keep to themselves, or a very few friends. They are an old race to instinctive worldly-wisdom, and yet have a full share of youthful force and feeling. Personally they are individualists, but they hold together understandingly, and they were already fairly well socialized long before Socialism was heard of. And there are many other contradictions. This is the curious nation that many strangers come to visit, and stay to study, and die here, as I have said. Their children, having become English, leave it to others to carry on the study—Frenchmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen, Americans. You have chosen an advantageous time for your visit. After immense and protracted efforts in war, the nation, naturally, has a strong sense of achievement. It has seldom been so fully, or so nearly, awake. It is still very active, in sections at least, and schemes and plans busily, and builds castles in the air. Despite the many temptations to "grouching" it

"grouses" very little. It is optimistic and confident. It is still optimistic about its new Government. It has a good conscience and good hopes about India. It is underfed, but its health is better than before, though its stamina is lower. The chief sufferers are the women: and there is more chivalry in the men towards their womenfolk than there was. The war bred habits of prompt action. The sharing of dangers and difficulty fostered sympathy, and sympathy unloosed the tongues of the shy and taciturn, so that the English began, at last, to talk to each other in trains. They were deeply cheered by the powerful support and the kindness of the Dominions. The British Empire means more to them than it did. America has been re-discovered, a very different America from what Columbus discovered. And all the Allies are better known and better appreciated. About the vagaries, or worse, of Russian policy the English are still patient and optimistic.

Now I turn to the College. It is young—only 54 years old in all, and in its present form only 25. All the English universities are new, except two, Oxford and Cambridge. London and Durham, which are the oldest among the new, are about 120 years old. The next date from 1880. Several were founded in this century, and the youngest, Reading, in 1928. Some are not yet universities, e.g., Nottingham and Exeter, but hope soon to be. Exeter, though young, has adopted the old principle of residence, which prevails at Oxford and Cambridge, and is also illustrated in the Public Schools. The residential method is the distinctive contribution of the English to theory and practice in education. Its merits are numerous and convincing, and are fairly well known abroad. Its chief fault is its small scale. Only a few have the opportunity of benefiting by it. Time, I hope, will cure this scarcity.

The English scepticism about education, which I mentioned, takes the shape of insisting that the Schools shall train character whatever else they may do, or leave undone. By character many things are meant, but pre-eminently the sense of membership in a community, and the habit of responsible action with and for fellow-members. Schools cannot create genius, whether in scholarship or the arts or science, nor even talent. They cannot be relied on to discover it, for in many cases the greater gifts mature irregularly and waywardly in the young. Many outstanding men and women have made but little mark at school, and especially, as I suspect, in England. But the English expect schools to evoke and exercise the social conscious-

ness in all pupils, and to prepare them thus for adult citizenship. This cannot be done by lessons on civics, or by premature information about taxes, or police proceedings, or elections, or social problems, or international, or by any sort of talk at all, but by practice and habit. The pupils learn community by living it. The community does the talking by its rules, its hierarchy, its requirement of responsibility, and its sharing of control with chosen members. At Mardon Hall and Reed Hall, where students live ordinarily for three or four years, the junior men, newly-arrived freshmen, find themselves nobodies. The seniors, nearing their final examinations, are somebodies, or most of them, and those between gather experience and await their turn. The elective Committee is the intermediary between the Warden and the members. It manages various things, including the enforcement of rules and the imposing of penalties. The Wardens, who are ultimately responsible in all matters, are in general willing that much of the work of control should be done for them by the men themselves, through the Committee. The Committee locks doors and windows at night, records the late-comers, manages the modest library, imposes fines, assists in entertaining guests, is the organ in major matters of public opinion, etc. To be a Committeeman is privilege and, therefore, responsibility; power and, therefore, a trust. You will agree, I hope, that at Mardon Hall and Reed Hall social inventiveness turns the necessities of the case on the one hand and the opportunities on the other to good account.

I need not expatiate further on the spirit and the technique of residence. You have had some experience of both since you arrived last week. You know the proverb: "When in Rome, do as Rome does". When in an English residential College, be as English as you can. At the worst it will be a three-weeks change. At the best it will be a happy and distinctive memory. My advice to you is to cherish the rules and regulations, and to respect authority in the Halls. The College knows best about Summer Courses. It has a long experience of foreign students, whereas you are new arrivals. And to sum it all up, the Wardens are always right. Make them your friends. I am not forgetting the heavy programme of lectures that has been prepared for you. You are here for three weeks only. So short a time, so much to do! You are really here for work. I hope that you will all work so hard that by the end you will be so worn and fatigued and exhausted that you will be glad to go.