TOPICS OF THE DAY

Chi a terre a tutto: THE SEEDS OF TIME: "FULL-ORBED UNIVERSITIES" AND GEESE: ASK ME NOT WHAT.

ONE sometimes wishes that certain truths were not quite so true. When a thing is so irrefutable that no one cares to deny it, when men stop arguing about it, then there is often a danger that it may be laid away like a mummy and have no further effect upon human action. Certainly, in politics, when a thing becomes an "established principle," and men begin to do it lip-service, it may be almost taken for granted that the principle is embalmed, and that it will never again break through the cerecloths of speech. In our case, a good example of this sort of truth is: *Agriculture is the basis of society.*

In political philosophy, of course, agriculture does not mean "increased wheat acreage," "export of apples," or anything that appears in the Statistics of a Department of the Interior. It does not include a state of affairs in which a large area in one part of a country goes out of cultivation because a Peace River District is "opened up" in another. Nor does it mean that a country-side is tilled by English Canadians in one generation and by Russian Canadians in the next. Agriculture, in the political sense, means a secular connection between a large part of the population and the land. Agriculture, if it is to have any moral or social significance, must be considered in terms of the farmer, who is the son, and the grandson, and the great-grandson of the soil.

I have often heard it asked in the last few years: "Why not settle colonies of Danes and Swiss and Dutch on the abandoned farms of older Canada, and let them introduce intensive production of cheese and bacon?" I retort always: "Why not colonies of Canadians?" This generally provokes the reply that you cannot get Canadians to farm in this way, that Canadians are not peasants, that Canadians are leaving the land, and so forth. I am not disposed to accept these dogmatic statements. Leave our urban youth out of the question for the moment. The natural increase of population in our agricultural areas is large, and much of it is annually lost to agriculture. Why not use this surplus agricultural population to introduce a new type of farming in Canada? If it goes to the cities or to the prairies or to the far north, it will have to adapt itself to a new way of living. A few years ago, a colony of

Canadians from the Bruce peninsula in Ontario were sent to the far north of the province. The colony has been successful, though the change was violent. From the older parts of Quebec, French Canadians have moved into northern Quebec and northern Ontario. Their colonies succeed. But, it will be said, it requires a great deal of capital to turn abandoned land, with a poor soil, into poultry farms and sheep-walks. On the other hand, we have any amount of capital, seemingly, to bring immigrants into new parts of the country, with all the attendant unsettlement of our life. Have we not capital, then, to salvage land that is opened up, already provided with roads and railways and postal service, provided with schools, provided with close markets of ever-increasing importance? Year after year, we spend our efforts in vast schemes to settle Europeans and others in agricultural communities, and to make the raw frontier life attractive to them. We open up roads and railways at prodigious expense, we facilitate their marketing, and talk about new canals and sea-routes for them. We give them schools, and so on. Surely only a fraction of this effort would be needed to keep under cultivation (of a new and scientific kind) abandoned areas in the older districts. This new kind of agriculture would even swell the rural population in many places that are not quite deserted, for it would require more labour.

Now, I know very well how it can be demonstrated on paper that the return on capital invested in any such scheme would not be as great as on capital invested in a new prairie section. Ricardo's theory of rent, and a number of other things, can be cited against it. But a larger view of things will justify the scheme economically. Danish bacon and New Zealand butter in our shops provide the final answer there. The true answer, however, to all objections is not arithmetical or economic; it is that continuity in our citizenship is above every other consi deration.

Is it because the effort would be a small one in any given area that no one is attracted to it? I sometimes think that this is the case. And yet, if all the abandoned and half-worked land in the Eastern parts of Canada is considered, the problem takes on gigantic proportions. Reforestation is only a part, and the simpler part, of the task. The Province of Ontario has taken in hand the planting of great areas in the Eastern Counties, which are abandoned farm lands, and suitable only for growing trees. Here the problem is fairly simple. These cheap lands are acquired by the province, and the timber grown will be public property. The Government has to deal only with land and trees, not with men and women. I recognize the greater difficulty of dealing with agricultural land,

left in private ownership. But the difficulty is not insuperable. And to despair of the success of such a scheme is to despair of our future altogether.

A revival of wool-growing in Nova Scotia, the application of chemistry to the soil of the Eastern Townships of Quebec, reforesting in many parts of New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario, co-operative marketing of dairy produce and fruit, these do not so quickly attract our attention as great mining areas, and new stretches of western wheat lands. One who suggests things of this kind is called imaginative. But imagination, tempered with a study of history, is exactly what is needed. The alternative, at any rate, is not engaging.

HOW few there are in a generation of men who see the *processes* amid which they live! Many know, in the slang phrase, "how things are done." This explains the ease with which a man may acquire a fortune in turbulent times. Many can compare present with past modes and manners, or state the difference between the political institutions of two countries. But to analyse a given society in terms of its past and in terms of its future means a peculiar combination of gifts: great powers of observation; the critical faculty which enables one to go to the heart of a great matter, brushing aside the trivial and accidental; political imagination, which can with ease suppose the thing that is not, and the transposition of men and things which will cause it to come into being. It amounts almost to "looking into the seeds of Time" and many, with Thomas Hardy, would deny that such a thing is possible. But to most Englishmen, as to most Greeks, with their creed that *Men make the State,* fatalistic pronouncements are either oppressive or nonsensical. Most Englishmen may be conscious of muddling through, so far as their own insight is concerned, but they think that some leaders are not muddling, and their whole political activity for generations and generations turns upon this belief. *Heroes and Hero-Worship* was an inspiration indeed, as the title of an address to Englishmen at large.

Yet even the heroes among Englishmen, and leaders such as Themistocles and Pericles among the Greeks, have not had the analytical acumen of which I speak. It was recognized by the Athenians that whereas they had had many skilful political leaders, there had been only one Solon. They called him their *Wise Man.* He had fathomed the deeper currents and knew, many generations in advance, the political, economic and social drift. In a later

age, when the Attic orators realised that they spoke in a crumbling world, their final appeal to men was to exhort them to act in the spirit of Solon's laws. But no new Solon arose in the world in which they lived.

In the Victorian Age, Bagehot understood many of the processes of his society, and indeed of contemporary societies. The tendency of British journalism; the real implications of the joint-stock company; the antecedents, the actual working and the coming development, in part, of the British Constitution; the flaws—which he saw widening into cracks—of the American Constitution,—these are some of the things he analysed with almost uncanny insight. He seemed to possess this sureness of touch from the very outset, when, as a young journalist, he so brilliantly described the political character of the French. In our day there have been many historians and observers who have seen that portentous changes await European society and its outposts. As change is distressing to all men, most of these have been prophets of gloom. But whether gloomy or not, hardly any of them have been helpful even to an understanding of the disaster, if disaster it must be. In the main they have dealt in large and loose analogies, or in dogmatic denunciations of the particular features they severally disliked. In a word, the diagnosis has been little more than a shaking of the head. If a company of scholars were asked to name an exception to this rule, perhaps the name of André Siegfried would occur to most.

But recently I have been reading an essay* which, in the mood of the moment at least, seems to me more profound than anything else of its kind. The War, the economic shifting, the reaction of the United States on Europe, and many of the more palpable features of the situation are taken into account. But these are all considered as ponderables, and as outward manifestations of the human spirit; the author concerns himself rather with the human spirit itself; whether it can surmount the débris of its own sloughings and castings; the meaning of civilization, in terms of machinery, universal literacy, scholarship, thought, truth and freedom. From what I have said already of the infrequency of the combination of gifts necessary to the writing of such an analysis, it will not be thought that I am hopeful there will be many readers even, sufficiently read in history and political philosophy, and sufficiently observant of Canadian affairs, to see the application of this eloquent essay to our country. Yet, firmly believing as I do in the power of education to change the world, I find myself wishing that I could put the book into the hands of every under-

(*) *Solon and Croesus*, by Alfred Zimmern—Oxford University Press—1928.

graduate student of the humanities and the pure sciences, and talk it over with them. After all, these students are not very numerous nowadays.

I quote two passages:

> Civilization consists neither in the accumulation of knowledge, nor in the perfecting of institutions, still less in the development of material inventions and conveniences. Civilization, as bequeathed to us by the Greeks, is a possession of the spirit: and its continuing element, both in the world as a whole and in individual communities, is the presence at any one time of a sufficient proportion of civilized persons—that is, of men and women who have individually made the effort to absorb, and, as it were, live over again in their own wider experience, the thought of their own predecessors in civilization. This is the only true sense in which we can speak of a civilized world or a civilized community. And the only valid test of political, social and (let it be added) economic institutions is whether they are such as to provide the community with an assured succession of such individuals. Abridge or limit this succession, and a process of decadence will inevitably set in. Not only thought itself will wither and decay, but the whole imposing super-structure of material wealth and power, the docks and the arsenals, the banks and the exchanges, will be touched with the same paralysis. For human affairs, like physical bodies, do not continue their accustomed movement when the impulse which has set them in motion has died down. History shows us more than one example of a community which relied for the continuance of its civilization upon the momentum of past activity rather than upon the living effort of the present. For all its mounting statistics, our twentieth-century society will pass into the same gray shadow if those who direct its fortunes forget that the maintenance of living thought, the promotion of the fundamental studies and their discipline, embodied in a sufficient succession of individual thinkers, is the principal condition of its life......
> ......But the increasing disproportion........between the devotees of the fundamental and the applied sciences does not touch the heart of the problem. Particularly striking though it is in these post-war years, it is not a new phenomenon. It was as familiar to Socrates and Plato as to ourselves. Gorgias, the rhetorician, was a greater attraction then Socrates, the critic of his phrases; and Isocrates, the founder of journalism, had a more fashionable name than Plato. That the appeal of thought should be lost on the many and heard only by the few, is only to be expected. The society of to-day, like other civilized societies before it, could carry on its work with the aid of those few. The real problem concerns the condition and activities of those few.

And again:

> We have become so much accustomed, in these latter days, to material standards that we have almost lost our sense of the

daily martyrdom of truth; and those who watch it at close quarters and even participate in its processes are apt to be too much ashamed, or hardened, or perhaps absorbed in a realm of their own to which they have retired for refuge, to proclaim their sufferings to mankind. Yet, in an age which spends millions on the external trappings of knowledge, which has replaced the close spiritual communion embodied in the Academy of antiquity and the *Universitas* of the Middle Ages by grandiose material structures called, and too often miscalled, by the same names, it is not only a duty to the republic of thinkers but an urgent civic obligation to draw attention to the conditions under which they are compelled to live. If the reservoirs which supplied a city with water were being secretly poisoned, the whole public would be astir, the culprits exposed and punished, and the danger laid once and for all. But when the wells of truth upon which the modern city depends for its moral health are being continuously tampered with, when the agencies of opinion, and even of thought, are being imperceptibly diverted from their true function and exploited for private profit or ambition, or even baser and pettier motives, the public cannot take the initiative because, even if dimly conscious of the evil, it is powerless to probe it to its source.

There is no law against lapses from intellectual integrity. To distort or suppress the truth for interested reasons is not, and could not be made, a statutory offence. But it is something infinitely graver than that. It is a breach of the unwritten convention upon which the world's intellectual life depends. Truthfulness is in the intellectual realm what honesty is in the economic. Where good faith, complete and entire, is in doubt, or can even be conceived to be in doubt, the psychological basis of credit is shaken, and business dealings become impossible. So it is in the world of thought. The mere suspicion that a writer or a teacher is allowing, or is capacle of allowing, his judgment to be influenced by something other than intellectual rectitude, is almost a sentence of banishment from that kingdom of the spirit. Without a complete assurance of good faith, in this realm as in the other, discussion is impossible and intercourse ceases. The outward form and semblance of intellectual activity may indeed remain. Degrees and titles and ceremonial occasions may abound. But they will not be tributes to a true activity of the spirit. They will but serve to deck out an elaborate sham, which every scholar who respects himself will be eager to shun.

Yet it is exactly this sham, this parade of intellectuality and its use for interested purposes, of which Croesus has always sought to take advantage: and conditions in the modern world have singularly facilitated his efforts. Socrates well knew the danger. "The whole of which rhetoric is a part," he told Gorgias, "is not an art at all, but the habit of a bold and ready wit, which knows how to manage mankind. This habit I sum up under the word 'flattery' ". In a society in which money standards are predominant, "bold and ready wits" are objects worth buying by those who seek a quick and easy way to "manage mankind."

The art of buying and using them has been carried to a pitch of which Socrates could never have conceived: and so has the kindred art of "managing mankind" through the exploitation of this intellectual servility.

THE editorial page of a well-known Canadian newspaper recently contained what purported to be a eulogy of Jack Miner. But heavy lettering attributed the authorship of the piece to the Principal of "Frontier College", and it contained some curious remarks about education.

> "For half a century and more," the article began, "society has been obsessed with the ideas that in youth, and within the walls of a school only, were the time and place (*sic*) to acquire an education."
>
> . . . . .
>
> "The stupendous task of the twentieth century is to transform the industry of the world into the university of the world. It is the undying glory of a trail blazer like Jack Miner that while other students were vainly beating the air within college walls of brick and stone and mortar, trying to get a one-sided education, he was busy developing a full-orbed university of his own on 200 acres in Essex County, Ontario."

These are sentences of a fine flavour, especially when it is remembered that the "full-orbed university of his own" is a sanctuary for geese. And how easily this principal of the "Frontier College" slips from a plea for adult education (a quite laudable object) into the commonplace ambition for things that are "bigger and better!" "The stupendous task of the twentieth century is to transform the industry of the world into the university of the world." "Industry of the world" is only a phrase, a very loose one; but if it means anything, it cannot mean a university. And why be eager to turn the world or its workers into a university, when, as the writer says in his next sentence, a university can give only a one-sided education, which consists of beating the air? This part of the eulogy of Jack Miner concludes with the words: "He has made his farm better known" (we are not told whether to the geese or to the Americans) "than are most of our colleges and universities. Had Canada 50,000 Jack Miners, we should have 50,000 farms, that are now abandoned, budding and blossoming as the rose."

Now, this last part interests me greatly, as readers of my first remarks above will understand. But for the life of me I cannot be sure whether the abandoned farms will bud and blossom as the

rose because they will be full-orbed universities, or because they will be better known to the public, or because of the droppings of the geese. However that may be, the Principal of Frontier College wields a fine rhetoric. I should judge he would be quite irresistible in a company of our politicians. Indeed, the latter part of his article reveals to us with an engaging simplicity how successful he has been with some of the Ottawa and Toronto ministers and members. Which brings us to the matter of Frontier College itself!

Frontier College is the name which has been given to educational work done among labourers in northern Ontario. Books and papers have been distributed, and night-school classes have been conducted in box-cars on railway sidings. This is thoroughly commendable work. One wishes that more of it were done, and hopes that what is done is well done. But, of course, it is nonsense to call it college work. Doubtless it is the principal's gift for rhetoric that is responsible for the sounding slogan "Frontier College." In the article from which I have quoted, he calls its students "mind accompanied by its twin sister, calloused hands."

The lamentable thing about this principal is not his full-orbed and full-blown rhetoric, which is too amusing to be lost, but his propensity for running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. I am told that Frontier College has recently published an announcement that it has secured from the Dominion Government a charter, and powers to confer degrees. After all, the principal would have the public believe that the "calloused hands" have "beaten the air." Is not this a fair conclusion? The colleges and universities are of no use, he argues; they give a one-sided education; they are not sufficiently known,—still he calls his institution a college, and seeks from the Dominion Parliament (which has no authority to grant it) power to confer diplomas and degrees.

I have observed that all of those who are engaged in the so-called "extra-mural work" of our universities show the same facility in shifting their ground. They will tell you that a university education is not the only education possible, with which any university graduate would agree. Sometimes they say that it is the work done by the solitary student which generally bears fruit. That Shakespeare, who went to no university, was a greater poet than Milton, who did! And so on, and so on. Then, in the same breath, they demand that university degrees be not confined to those who have attended universities! If you dare to say that this does not in the least follow from the previous premisses, you are reminded of the unfulfilled ambitions of your fellows. You are called unfair, undemocratic, selfish, and often you are told that

you do not realize how impossible it is, without dangling a university degree in front of them, to get school teachers to keep up their reading,—these teachers being the solitary students and the Shakespeares with whom we began!

* * *

Bottom: Masters, I am to discourse wonders, but ask me not what.
Quince: Tell us, sweet Bottom.
Bottom: Not a word.

COULD this stand for a description of large masses of our current politics? A Royal Commission of Investigation has followed to Los Angeles a former president of the Winnipeg Electric Company, and has sat there *in camera* to investigate "election gifts" made by the company to provincial politicians, and generally supposed to have something to do with the granting of power franchises. So much we are permitted to know. Readers of Hansard know that, for weeks past, strange remarks have been made on the floor of the House in Ottawa about another power scheme and the ways in which it was being promoted. Conversation in Toronto and Montreal, in intervals between discussions of stocks and mining shares, has turned upon the same subject, Bottom generally concluding with: "All that I will tell you is that the duke hath dined."

There was a time in Canadian history when such charges and dark sayings were followed by a political commotion. But we grow older and wiser. Many years ago I was horrified to hear it said casually, in a London club, that government in Canada was more corrupt than in the United States. In spite of my remonstrance, it was as casually agreed to by others present, and I noted with dismay that those who held this view most strongly were two English men of affairs, who had seen much of politics in Ottawa and Washington, as well as in London. I still think the comparison, except in so far as it was made for my particular benefit, rather pointless; the sort of statement that can never be verified. On the other hand, it was good for the modesty of my patriotism, and in the interval I have learned much.

C. W. S.