

toward it without regard to the contour of the ground underfoot, any little inequality such as a doorsill (if you are indoors) or a stone in the path (if you are outdoors) may upset you. You fall with an abruptness that is foreign to the experience of older and larger people. There is no process of stumbling and gradually losing your balance; you go down with a thump, and make known your disappointment.

My son's major sorrows, however, are usually connected with the departure of friends. He likes company. The more people are about, the better he feels. When we leave him alone on the porch, even the sport of chair-climbing fails to console him for a time. He follows after us to the glass doors, presses his face against them, and wails. I think his idea of a thoroughly enjoyable place would be the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, where there are always plenty of people about. He would waddle up and down with his Lord Fitztravers air and look at the people and laugh inordinately, as much as to say, "Well, here we all are, and what could be funnier than that?"

His cheerfulness is not the conscious optimism of a Pollyanna, determined to see the bright side of a dismal world; nor of the professional mixer, bent on achieving a powerful personality and zipping things up for the sake of better business. It is the cheerfulness of one who just likes everything from his cereal in the morning to his soup at night, and takes those present into his confidence. Even his taste in humor is unspoiled. Others may draw sophisticated merriment from the repartee of French farces or the knowing wit of the columnists; but my son knows what is really most amusing. It is to put your head down on the floor, look between your legs, and see your father and mother upside down. That, after all, is the really humorous experience. The person who can laugh so hard at that that he loses his balance and falls down is your truly right-minded citizen. So let us not be unduly

distressed at the cynical younger generation. What is more to the point is that at this present writing the youngest generation is coming along famously.

THE OPTIMIST

BY CHARLES A. BENNETT

I HAVE a friend who is an optimist. In fact, I have several. I am going to roll them all into one and call him (or them) Beauchamp, after the most famous of all multiple personalities.

You must be familiar, to the point of nausea, with the term "the modern mind." People talk of it as though it were a modern invention, like the modern alarm clock, modern advertising, or modern methods of dairy farming. But for all that the phrase is worn thin by use, the thing itself is mysterious. What is the modern mind? A mess—you will say in your haste. But be patient. Let us be scientific. Let us analyze. This is where Beauchamp comes in, for Beauchamp's mind is modern. I am quite sure of that. Let us study the modern mind writ small in the person of Beauchamp. We will confine ourselves to his optimism.

It differs from some well-known brands. Thus Beauchamp does not deny outright the existence of evil. When he has a pain he does not say: "Go to, now, I have not got a pain." He has enough sense to see that before the existence of pain can reasonably be denied it must first have been asserted. Now the original assertion, "I have a pain," may be error or illusion or anything you please—in any event it deserves a bad name. Pain may not exist, but persons who think they have pain unquestionably do, and that is an evil. Thus Beauchamp "has no use for" the idea that by cultivating healthy and optimistic thoughts and by ignoring evil you can dispose of it.

Nor again does he accept the philosophy which says that what we mortals call evil exists for the sake of some universal good—that philosophy which

has been so adroitly summarized—and exposed—in the epigram: This is the best of all possible worlds and everything in it is a necessary evil. That every so-called evil has a place in a divine scheme of things is a doctrine which makes no appeal to Beauchamp, for, in the first place, he does not like to use the word divine: it smacks of the supernatural and is therefore “unscientific”—and to be unscientific is to blaspheme. Secondly, you cannot expect any man to get excited about so vague and abstract a thing as “the good of the whole.” Imagine yourself, so Beauchamp might say, in the grip of some tragic bereavement. A philosophic friend approaches you and offers you by way of consolation: “Cheer up! Your suffering, if you could only see it, somehow contributes to the good of the whole.” Would you not cry out from your anguish, “But what is this whole, and what in Heaven’s name is its good that I should be reconciled to suffering for its sake?” What’s Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba? The friend would have to summon all his philosophy to compose a satisfactory answer.

No. Beauchamp’s optimism, although in some respects it is kin to these, is much less ambitious and pays more attention to facts. It rests on two principles or dogmas: First, every cloud has a silver lining. Second, we are progressing. Evolution says so. Thus if, in a pessimistic mood, I tell him that the world seems to me to be full of murderers and crooks and adulterers and statesmen, he will counter by calling my attention to all the honest men, happy families, and disinterested public servants that dot this human scene. If after a visit to a jail or a hospital I emerge oppressed by a sense of the mass of human suffering, Beauchamp reminds me that the occupants of jails and hospitals constitute only a fraction of the total population. Think of all the happy people outside. So it goes. I note the evils incident to the growth of machines, industry, applied

science, newspapers, democratic government; Beauchamp quite properly points out the benefits conferred by these. Quite properly, too, he condemns my way of looking at things as willful, arbitrary, one-sided, and the rest. Of course, we do not get on, though we may get amusement, from sitting on opposite ends of this seesaw; but that is not my point. What strikes me as strange is that Beauchamp should think that his silver lining—all the happy folk—somehow cancels the dark side of the cloud on which I am gazing. How can the knowledge that there is a bright side reconcile me to the fact there is a dark side? In other words, is there any conceivable way in which any amount of good could cancel or offset or be balanced against the smallest amount of evil?

This question brings me to Beauchamp’s second dogma. According to the first, there is at any moment enough good discoverable to counterbalance the evil. The second says: Even if this is not so now, there will in the future be enough good to outweigh the evil. For we are getting on, oh, assuredly, says Beauchamp, we are getting on! “Consider the modern treatment of prisoners and the sick, and throw in the defective and the insane for good measure, and compare it with the treatment they received a hundred years ago. Think of education and transportation and sanitation [do all good things, I wonder, end in -ation?] and production and the emancipation of women and surgery and medicine. . . .” And so on and so on. Needless to say, I do not deny that in these matters we have progressed. “Well, then?” asks Beauchamp, as though I had conceded him the victory. I point out to him that he says not only “We have got on,” but, “We shall continue to get on.” And evidently on the farthest horizon of prophecy he sees the shining towers of the earthly city, the far-off event to which the whole creation moves. As a man looks down the tracks of a railroad and sees them stretching

off into the distance and is prescient that they lead to a marble palace which men call a terminal, so Beauchamp sees reaching out into the future the ringing grooves of change along which the Twentieth Century Limited which men call Civilization shall ride safely into Utopia. But where does he get his assurance from? How does he know that he has taken enough of the arc of progress to enable him to predict the whole curve? For all he knows, that which he takes to be a straight-away may be but a bend in the tracks and the name of the terminal may be Hell or Chaos. The answer lies in one word—Evolution. Beauchamp says he believes in Evolution. By that he means two things: First, he thinks there is a something called Evolution that does things. "Evolution," he often says, "brings or will bring this or that to pass." Secondly, Evolution makes for progress. In short, Evolution is his God or Providence, the Power not Beauchamp that makes for righteousness.

It would be interesting—for me—to dwell upon the damnable errors in Beauchamp's philosophy of evolution, but I am now concerned only with his optimism. I will grant him all he says about evolution; I will grant him perfectibility and progress and the far-off divine event. All right. And now how do we stand with regard to evil?

Evil—all evil—is too bulky a concept to be manageable. We must simplify. We will take just one example—toothache. No one will deny that this is an evil. If anyone is inclined to do so, I can only repeat the Playboy's wish: "May I meet him in the road, he to have one tooth only, and it aching." Very well then: a man has a toothache and now Beauchamp informs him that we shall go on learning to conquer disease and pain until one day the

human race will be immune from them. How precisely does that thought help the sufferer now? If he says, as he probably does, "Damn the universe in which such things are possible," how can the prospect of a universe from which such pain is eliminated obliterate the fact that the universe once was bad enough to contain that pain? Of course, if goods and evils were like lumps of sugar, that can be set in opposite pans of a balance, Beauchamp's method would work. But unfortunately they are not, so it doesn't. You cannot base optimism on the fact of progress.

I have criticized Beauchamp's philosophy, so perhaps it is only fair to expound my own. This, fortunately, is neither the time nor the place for an exposition. I will content myself with a story. It is called, quite simply, *The Egg*.

An optimist and a pessimist were having breakfast together. The pessimist ordered a boiled egg. He cut off the top, English fashion. As he did so a faint nauseating odor assailed him.

"This egg," he exclaimed, "is bad!"

The optimist was true to his principles. "Never mind a little thing like that," he said. "Turn it up the other way and effect an entrance by the other end. You will, I am sure, find parts of it quite edible."

You see, he was telling the pessimist to look upon the bright side of the egg.

"My dear man," said the pessimist, "don't be absurd. An egg is either good or bad without further qualification. It can't be just good or bad in spots. An egg which smells like this is bad, even though"—here he looked savagely at the other—"even though it should have a dozen silver linings."

With that he hurled the egg across the table at the optimist.

Well, I am the pessimist and the universe is my egg.



What We Have to Be Thankful For

BY EDWARD S. MARTIN

HERE comes around again the month of Thanksgiving and it behooves us to consider what, if anything, we have to be thankful for. Undoubtedly, as compared with other countries, we have a great deal. Our farmers are not very prosperous; our fuel supply is more precarious and more costly than it should be; our railroads have to scramble hard to keep up with the demands on them; we have more murders and more hold-ups and more law-breaking generally than we should, and there are other drawbacks to our perfect satisfaction with our material circumstances. But on the whole they are good. We have enough to eat. Housing lags, but not many of us are living in trees or are homeless. There is very little unemployment. On the contrary, labor is scarce and wages are high beyond all precedent. A large proportion of our population is finding due pleasure and satisfaction in life. We are for the moment the richest country in the world and we are spending a good deal of our money on things we think are remunerative. Anyone who went out on the road in a motor car last summer must have been impressed with the great number of people who were refreshing themselves by that method. Many families, evidently not rich, one saw traveling in touring cars on the highways, and noticed innumerable signs out on farmhouses of food and lodging or campsites for tourists. Our people certainly move about. The roads of the country

are a great phenomenon. The travel on them is extraordinary and the pleasure derived from it—change of scene and thought and the enlargement of the understanding that follows—must be reckoned as one of our causes of thankfulness. We do not yet migrate in flocks and droves like the birds and wild creatures, but the mass of the people in this country probably do move around more than any other people on earth except some Arab tribes and the gypsies, and that is a good thing. To see other people and how they live and what they look like gets minds out of ruts and puts new pictures in them, and that makes somewhat for the understanding of life.

On the material side, at least, we Americans of the United States seem to be doing better than anybody else. But how about the spiritual side? Are we getting to be better people, wiser, more courageous, more alive to our responsibilities in the world? Are we more religious or less religious, and is the religion we have doing us as much good as it ought to?

These are really the great questions of the hour. Here is the world in a depressing state, very precarious at this writing in its political outlook. There is Europe disturbed by new complications that actually threaten war, and by other complications that have dragged along for months and that at least impede and imperil the return of peace. And just at this writing the papers are full of the dis-