

## ON BEING ECONOMICAL

BY ORLO WILLIAMS

THE newspapers send up a cry for greater economy, and the individual, who has been pinched for the last five years, wonders how much longer he will be able to meet the increased cost of living. The expense of the summer holiday is now over, and the problems of the second half of the financial year confront every owner of a not too well-lined purse. Some people have a gift for making both ends meet over any circumference, some cannot rest content unless there is considerable salvage to spare, and others, whether in fat years or in lean, are by nature incapable of finishing up on the right side of the ledger.

The first class is rewarded by the success of its contrivance, however weary its process may have been; the second, if unduly apprehensive and tending to the miserly, is to be congratulated on attaining peace of mind, if only temporary, at each balancing of accounts; but the third, though it gains more precarious enjoyment, ever heedless of the day of reckoning, is the one really to be pitied. It suffers agonies and embarrassments untold, yet is unable to find a reason for its failure or a cure for its errors. Yet the members of this class are often really the most admirable in their attitude to money.

Those who make both ends meet, either to a nicety or with something to spare, are apt to become too absorbed in their problem. They feel uneasy at the sight of money passing from themselves to others; they handle their purses shrewdly, inserting well-trained,

meticulous fingers which can be trusted not to pull out half a crown when two shillings will do; and they take out their check-books with a sigh, fearfully glancing at the balance neatly noted in the counterfoil. They can undertake nothing without counting the cost. If they fall into the temptation of an expensive pleasure, a slight shadow is cast over their enjoyment, and they are checked in their enterprises by the friction between coin and pocket. But the gay spenders whose outlay, without being truly wild and reckless, is always a little larger than their receipts, are the people to whom money is neither a god nor a cherished possession, but only a means to agreeable ends. If the end is mere personal enjoyment of a sensual kind, they have the lie in the soul and deserve the bitter reward of their own folly.

But these fine, careless spenders are usually less selfish and more generous than the successful economists. They have warm impulses and gratify them without a qualm: money enables them to give substance to their ideas and reality to their imaginations. It is just a medium, like petrol to a motor cylinder, and they use it to the last drop without thinking of the level in the tank, for their ideas are always in advance of their capacities, and when one child of the imagination is being clothed a hundred others are born in the process. To such a one shopping is an endless temptation. He — and more often she — cannot set his face sternly toward one article and bear it stonily away, looking neither to the

right nor to the left. He cannot resist some particularly attractive accompaniment, some appropriate gift for a friend, some sudden apparition of a long-felt want, some inevitable improvement for the comfort of life. He seldom knows how much money he has on him to begin with, and he pours it out without counting, thinking not of it, but of what it buys. He runs up a bill quite confident in future ability to pay, only to be astounded later by the accumulated audacity of his confidence. He will never be mean, for his pocket is in his clothes — not in his heart: comparative poverty will not starve his imagination, and no wealth will be too great for his ideas. It is his tragedy that his wealth is always too small for them, since, seeing all the admirable uses to which money can be put, he cannot circumscribe himself to the poor few which his income will cover.

Madame de Warens, lavish of her person as well as of her purse, was one of these, as Rousseau, himself no miser, did not scruple to point out. There are some fortunate individuals who seem able to snap their fingers in the face of prudence with impunity. Their motto is always to do themselves well and to have the best of everything, as well as to give it, because, as they say, it pays in the end. If they cast any bread upon the waters — they would cast nothing but the finest new wheaten loaf — it will return to them well buttered. They go to the best hotels, where they meet people who are of use to them: their sumptuous trappings give them assurance which shows their capabilities in their best light. They are the Rolls-Royces among men, who need a flood of petrol or they are useless. The strange thing is that they usually get it without difficulty. But woe betide the runabouts of this world who, not having the Rolls-Royce tem-

perament, use its maxims as their own sophisms! That the best always pays is only true if you can pay for the best, or get somebody to do so for you; and an unwillingness to spoil a ship for a ha'porth of tar is only justified if your income runs to something larger than a rowing boat.

Nevertheless, whatever trouble unwarranted expenditure of money may bring to all except the lucky few, it is questionable whether economy in its essence is a virtue, however valuable it may be as a safeguard. The word is often used as if it were synonymous with thrift, which it is not. It strictly means good management and avoidance of waste. As such it is praiseworthy, but can hardly be exalted to the plane of loving kindness or genius. Thrift, too, is only praiseworthy within limits. Old Grandet was far less admirable than poor cousin Pons. After all, there is nothing particularly virtuous in checking expenditure irrespective of its possible object, for wealth is only energy, and to keep it idle is to withdraw it from the community for a time. The fact that money is one of the few forms in which energy can be stored without deterioration for an indefinite time has given a special dignity to the saving propensity when applied to money. Somebody benefits by it in time, so that the effort of thrift always appears to be justified.

In other activities, not altogether logically, we are not so apt to look on thrift with admiration. The man who carefully measures the energy that he puts into a task is not the best workman, and the artist who doles out his talent has usually little enough to draw upon. Genius at work has always been extravagant, both of intellectual energy and bodily health, and we habitually forget our debt to this great extravagance which enriches us, when we reflect reproachfully on the

lesser extravagance which only ruined our benefactor. When we judge Byron we seldom take into account what he spent on *Don Juan*, nor do we remember how much of his greater self Benvenuto Cellini put into a silver cup when we hold up our hands over his immoralities. The profusion of Mozart and Schubert is their glory, and not their shame; and what economy could have produced the cathedral at Rheims?

Economy at its best is the power of extracting the most from any given amount of energy or power. There are few better examples of economy than the good motor driver who, by care of his machine, by cunningly adjusting his levers, by taking his corners slowly, by nursing his machine up hills and easing it on declines, obtains the maximum mileage from a gallon of petrol and has the smallest bill for repairs. A bad example of economy is the owner of a motor who refrains from using it because petrol and rubber are so dear. But if a dead machine be left out of the question, and the man himself be taken as the power unit, it is interesting to speculate where true economy comes in.

Who is the true economist of himself? Is it the man who treats his body with respect, clothing it well, feeding it judiciously, resting it when tired, diverting it when bored, keeping plenty of energy in hand for emergencies, and taking all major repairs promptly to the doctor? Possibly he is, and yet it would seem that in spending so much forethought on conserving physical energy he may be wastefully spending the much more precious and volatile energy of the spirit. England is full of these good body-economists. They keep fit, they look rosy and well, they get through their daily task with

the ease of a smoothly running engine and forget all about it over their evening rubber. A healthy Englishman is a pleasant sight, and the community cannot afford to do without him, but one is at times visited with doubts as to the total sum of energy which his own particular motor contributes to the great dynamo of the world. The really powerful individual engines seem to care little about the conservation of energy. Something drives them on, no matter what the conditions. They will shake themselves to death with screws loose; they will struggle on, groaning for want of oil; rest to them is waste, and repair a needless delay. And so they clatter themselves away, pounding day and night, to an early scrap-heap. They may be bad economists, but their effect is wonderful. Men point to the work that they have done, and their names are remembered with honor long after they have been scrapped beyond all reassembling.

Luckily, perhaps, for the world, few men or women are blessed with this superabundance of energy, for none can hold them in check and the voice of prudence is drowned in their explosions. Yet occasions come to most of us when we must make the momentous choice between economy of ourselves and extravagance. To all leaders, to all healers, to all soldiers, to all with a message, and to all with a light, whether it be in art, science, philosophy, or social service, such moments must come: there is usually little doubt about the decision, for its result on their own mechanisms is usually the least element in forming it. Fortunate then are those who, having been economical in small things, can pass cheerfully to extravagance in greater, breaking the habits and dissipating the energy of a lifetime.

## ECONOMICS, TRADE, AND FINANCE

### SETTING THE WORLD'S HOUSE IN ORDER

BY OLIVE HOCKIN

PEACE being signed, we have arrived at that moment which for five years has been awaited with such intense longing by every individual in the country — that Elysian time of 'after the war,' when once again life was to flow serenely and easily as in the care-free days of old. 'After the war!' What a magic there was in that phrase! After the war we might lay aside spade and plough and take up again the violin or the needle. Not that spades and ploughs would be any the less needed — but it was hard work to handle them, and might just as well be left to 'somebody else.' After the war we might again expect to spend our summer afternoons in the garden, playing tennis perhaps without having had to cut and mark out the court for ourselves; and a boy of the 'lower classes' — whose nature it is to work and not to play tennis — would save us even the trouble of fetching our balls. After the war we would have again a competent staff of servants to do all the work of the house, to feed us and clean us, and clear up each day whatever litter we happened to leave about. We have all worked hard during the war — many of us have overworked — and surely we are justified now in demanding a little relaxation and a return to our more leisurely pre-war habits.

Quite justified indeed. Why not? But it happens that it is not only members of the upper and middle classes who have worked hard during

the war. It has been a time of strain for all — high and low. And if we ourselves feel compelled to sit down and relax, and breathe somewhat more easily, so — strange as it may seem — so also do others, those others upon whose labor our very existence depends.

The miners are tired of heaving up coal day by day, hour after hour, while we take our ease and warm ourselves of a winter evening, and while mine owners spend their royalties on motor tours and town and country mansions. The lower-class boy is tired of picking up balls while others play — he demands education, a chance of rising, and leisure to play himself. Domestic servants are tired of cleaning our rooms and running about all day at anyone's beck and call. They look for work which gives to them also some freedom and a modicum of leisure in which to sit down sometimes, and see to their own affairs.

And so it is that the longed-for pre-war state of things has not come back. There is almost as great a shortage of goods and food and labor as ever there was during the four years of stress. And whereas, during the war, all hands were straining their utmost to make good the deficiency, now on the contrary nobody wants to work! On the signing of the armistice, even before the signing of peace, war work (work of communal necessity) was given up on every hand. And while those who had labored voluntarily slipped back into their life of leisure and sport, the 'lower orders' — those whose 'nature' it is to work — were, of course, expected to go on as before, toiling in the factory and the mine, the bakery or