

WHAT CAN BE SAID TO THE YOUNG?

NO book, or library, will give to the Commencement speaker this year infallible advice for the young. If he tells the gathered graduating class of a high school just what they should do to save their country, he will be only exercising the ancient oratorical privilege of omniscience. What has happened to the world is clear enough. Its social controls—religion, philosophy, morality, the practice of the humanities and the arts have lagged behind our technological advances. We are children given guns, with which, untaught, we shoot our brothers. Why and how this has happened many are eager to explain; and though their theories differ, more than one may be correct. But what to do about a world situation which will not wait for preaching—that, except for the immediacies of self-defense, is in the mists.

But this much—and it is not little—may be said to young people of the oncoming generation who—if they are Americans—have probably some years ahead in which it will be their job to learn how to live, and if possible lead, in a twentieth century where the best trained experts, the most well meaning men, the finest technologists will be the slaves of a despotism if they do not learn how to keep government the servant, not the master, of the people. The knowledge, if not the wisdom, which can produce a better world-order, or certainly a better and stronger and safer order in a country which, like the United States, controls a continent, is already available. It is part of that higher education in economics, statecraft, psychology, sociology, yes, and literature and philosophy, in which the older generation has failed to find the necessary vitamins. The right answers to the right questions are undoubtedly implicit in the studies of human relations of the last twenty years, which

have progressed incredibly; just as an increased control of nature was implicit in the brilliant discoveries in science of the nineteenth century. The young student with, say, four years of college ahead of him, does not himself have to invent new materials of education. Unused possibilities of both new and old knowledge are in every university curriculum. It is not so much what to do in the distribution of wealth, in the balancing of production and consumption, in the restriction of war, that is in real doubt. It is how to do it. Clearly the right questions have not been asked, since the answers even when intelligent, have been often futile.

Often, but not always! The remarkable fact about the disastrous tens, twenties, thirties, and forties of this century, is that never in the history of the world has progress, real progress, in many fields been so rapid. If there is to be a millenium, then in health, sustenance, transportation, communication of minds, shelter, distribution of goods, we have been more rapidly constructive in its pursuit than any era of ten times the length of ours. If the fifth century Roman seeing a Europe of exhausted soil, with a slave system breaking down, and the means of civilized life becoming yearly more difficult to obtain, had every reason to be a pessimist, the same cannot be said for an American of 1940. He knows what *may* happen in a world breaking down into violence and despotism because its civilization could not keep up with the effects of the industrial revolution. But

he also knows what *can* happen, and, specifically, what can be done in an America forced to reorganize a nineteenth century economic system to fit the facts, and to revitalize a traditional democracy by the use of gains in knowledge made under its freedoms, though escaped from its inadequate controls.

We can tell all this to the young, but we cannot, unfortunately tell them what questions they must ask in order to get the answers they will so bitterly need. It is their job to find out before their time of action comes. That will be the education of the best young people going from schools to college or universities this year. No matter how the headlines flare, it is probable that, for the next few years anyhow in the United States, the boys and girls of sixteen to twenty will seek what we sought in higher education—social contacts, a good time, knowledge, and professional efficiency. But they will have to do more if the next American generation is going to do better with the controls of technology and of human nature than we did. We invented the tractor and got the tank. We invented the airplane, and may lose our cities. We invented the radio, and have mass propaganda. Somebody has to ask why, and get answers that can be put to work. The young must ask them, for it is the young who must do the work when their time comes. That is their job for the next few years. That is what our generation can honestly, and not un- hopefully, tell them.

H. S. C.

That We Survive

Melville Cane

IN this black hour,
When skies are dark with hate,
And sweet green earth lies prostrate, charred and sere;
When the crazed savage smashes at the gate,
Ravishing all we hold most dear;
In this so cruel and portentous hour,
In spite of every outward sign
Of ruin and of holocaust,
All's not lost.
Believe!
Believe!
That fire itself is helpless to devour
Or undermine
The treasure of the spirit.
Believe!
Be brave—
That we survive
Though all that world we loved be left a grave!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"British Speech Invaded"

SIR:—Is the expression *white-haired boy* an Americanism? So H. L. Mencken implies in the article "British Speech Invaded" [SRL, June 1] where he calls attention to the use of the expression in the *London Times*: "Prior, Ramsay, Smart and some others are no longer the collectors *white-haired boys* that they were." But Maria Edgeworth, in her novel "Castle Rackrent," published in 1800, has old Thady say of Sir Condy Rackrent: "As for me, he was ever my *white-headed boy*; often's the time . . . he would slip down to me in the kitchen and love to sit on my knee . . ." Miss Edgeworth appends this note: "*White-headed boy*—is used by the Irish as an expression of fondness. We are at a loss for the derivation of this term."

BROTHER C. PHILIP.

Manhattan College,
New York.

SIR:—Mr. Mencken thinks that the *London Times* ("the most English in all England") used an Americanism in the following statement: "Prior, Ramsay, Smart and some others are no longer the collectors' *white-haired boys* that they were."

Webster's New International Dictionary of 1928 gives, among others, the following definition of the adjective *white*. Regarded with especial favor; favorite; darling. *Obsolete*.

"I am his *white boy*, and will not be gulled." *Ford*. It gives the following definition of the noun *whiteboy*. A favorite. *Obsolete*

"One of God's *whiteboys*" *Bunyan*.

Mr. Seumas MacManus, in his "The Rocky Road to Dublin," quotes a poem by Ethna Carbery, entitled "Páistín Fíonn," and he translates this as "Fair-haired Boy."

Dinneen's *Irish-English Dictionary* says that *páistín* means a child and that the adjective *fíonn* means white, pale, fair (of hue, hair). And the expression is common in Gaelic literature.

Might not the *Times* have picked up the expression from the Irish? We evidently did.

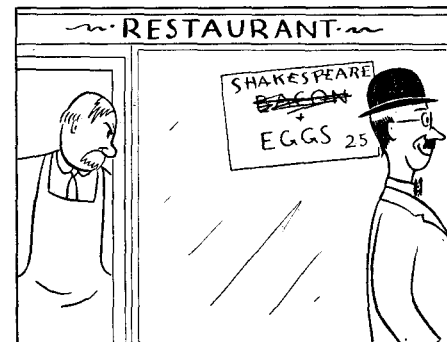
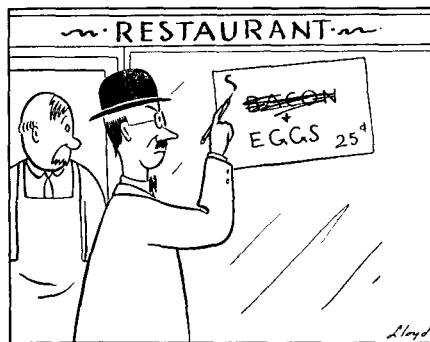
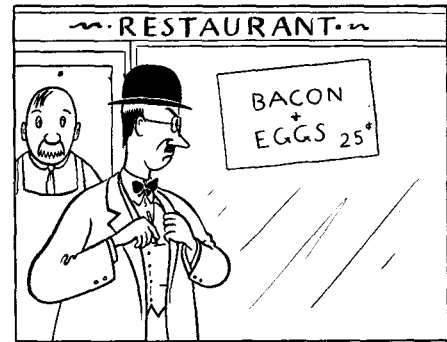
MAY HENDERSON TAYLOR.

Los Angeles, California.

SPPAR

SIR:—Are any of your readers interested in the organization of a Society for the Protection and Preservation of Arabic Numerals?

If not, will those opposed contend that the disposition of NLRB cases is really more clearly expressed by the picture-writing on page 18 of your issue of May 25 than it would be by



the appropriate combinations of the old-fashioned digits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 0? Or is the concept 1000 more easily grasped by the modern mind when represented by three little men at a bar?

ALLAN M. PRICE.

New York City.

Not So Unimportant

SIR:—In Mr. Aldington's *Imagist* memoirs [SRL, March 16] I find the following: "By way of insinuating that the Imagists were merely an unimportant clique, Ezra raked together a number of easily forgotten poets in a Catholic Anthology." Among the contributors to the Catholic Anthology which I (and, I am led to believe, a number of other people) have found it easy to remember were Mr. Pound himself, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, and William Butler Yeats.

PERRY REED.

Palestine, Texas

"St. Nicholas"

SIR:—The article "St. Nicholas," in your issue of May 4th was most interesting. However, there was in said article no mention of a weekly publication by Harpers, known at first as *Harpers' Young People*, but later as *Harpers' Round Table*. The first volume appeared in 1880, but I have not discovered at what time publication ceased.

While it could not maintain the high

standard of *St. Nicholas*, *Harpers' Young People* was a boon to those with limited incomes and could boast of a number of contributors whose reputation is indisputable. Among these were to be found: Frank R. Stockton, Kirk Munroe, Sarah Orne Jewett, James Otis, Mary E. Wilkins, Palmer Cox, Margaret Sangster, Thomas Nelson Page, and Louisa M. Alcott.

Could it be that Mr. Calkins did not know of this magazine?

EILEEN W. FOSTER.

Information, Please

SIR:—I am planning a study of the great mathematician, Joseph Louis Lagrange (1736-1813), and I am anxious to obtain access to as much of Lagrange's manuscript material as is possible. I should be grateful for any information concerning these manuscripts.

GEORGE SARTON.

Harvard Library,
Cambridge, Mass.

SIR:—I am making a study of the life of the prophet Nostradamus (1503-1566). I would appreciate hearing from persons having material either upon his life or upon his book "Prophetic Centuries." Any material sent will be carefully copied and returned safely. Thank you.

E. C. JACOBSEN.

Lock Drawer 7,
Story City, Iowa.