

There Is No Middle Way

FELIX FRANKFURTER

THE magic of Oxford is not only a British possession. For nearly eight hundred years it has cast its spell wherever the writ of the humanities has run. We in the United States claim a special hold upon its beauty. Oxford has taught our citizens; it has inspired our scholars; it has given depth and breadth to our political and cultural heritage. But Oxford is not merely a group of lovely buildings where generations of teachers have handed on the torch of learning. It is a way of giving life to the word wherever the word is read or spoken. That is why the real democratizing of Oxford has been accomplished not by Acts of Parliament, nor even by great thinkers whose thoughts have overleapt its walls and crossed the Atlantic to these shores. The democratizing of Oxford has been accomplished by those who first made its books available to literate mankind. "A true university," said Carlyle, "is a library of books." In that sense, the Oxford Press in America has been a true university. For almost one-third of the life of this republic, it has shown a sense of responsibility toward the nourishing of the mind and spirit of our society which demands our recognition and gratitude. It has placed at our disposal not only the treasures of ancient learning in form appropriate to the treasures, but with audacious modesty, befitting its great tradition, it has given us insights into our own history, knowledge of our own literature, analysis of our own problems. One hundred and fourteen Fifth Avenue has a place beside Harvard and Yale, beside Princeton and Columbia, as a great center of fructifying thought.

No time is more appropriate than the present to salute that institution which has the secret of renewing its youth while it adds to its age. Democracy demands, as does no other form of society, that its citizens understand their institutions and their problems. Indeed, democracy is dependent upon the pervasiveness of such understanding among its citizens. I have heard Plato claimed as an Oxford man, and it was Plato who said that he judged a state by ascertaining whether the Minister of Education was more important than the Minister of War. The agonies through which we have passed and the agonies which still beset us give vivid meaning to Plato's judgment. We can no longer afford war. We can no longer afford mass insecurity. We can no

longer afford the kind of aggression, whether internal or external, that makes power other than a means for the well-being of society, and society conceived as the whole of mankind. In the long run the remedy for these ills lies in education. We have passed the point in history when we can afford the misery of ignorance. We understand—or civilization as we have known it, and have dreamed it, will perish. There is no middle way.

In the years between the wars few things were more disturbing than the number of citizens who gave up the effort to understand our problems. In these years when we are building peace it is at least as disturbing that perhaps as many accept the picture of events made by men and women who have an interest in coloring it one way or another. It is immaterial whether the interest be that of dogma or of dollars. Education means the power to reduce the number of citizens who give up the effort of disinterested and responsible understanding to an unimportant proportion of the commonwealth. For where the effort is made, there citizens are found; and where citizens are found, responsibility is squarely forced upon a statesman to explain, if need be to justify, the policy he proposes. Democratic government may indeed be defined as the government which accepts in the fullest sense the responsibility to explain itself. It can operate successfully only when statesmen know not merely that they will be held to account for what they do, but that those who hold them to account can weigh facts and reflect upon their meaning. To equip citizens for this understanding and for the exercise of this responsibility, is, I venture to believe, the function of education in a democratic society.

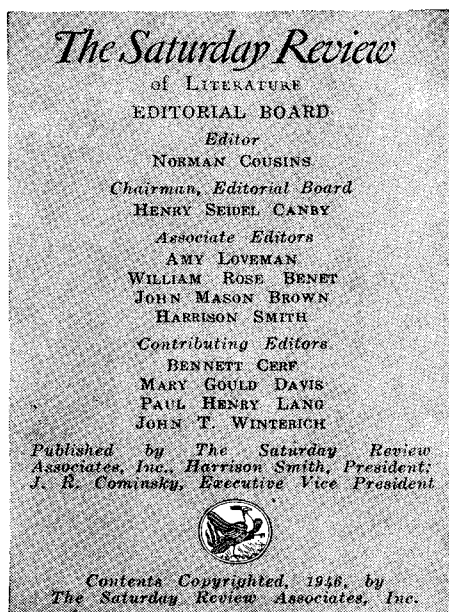
And not the least aspect of education is to see that principles are adequate to changing needs. They have to take on fresh meaning if they are to meet the problems of changing times. Lincoln understood that and expressed it with a final simplicity in his Second Inaugural: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the

stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." He spoke of the inadequacy of the "dogmas" of the past, not of truths that endure—the truths that express the conditions indispensable for the free spirit of man. Part of the secret of Oxford's eternal youth has been its power of creative adaptation. That is why its life has always been a tradition in America; it has also been a challenge. And this Press has published the ideas which make the challenge. Let us always remember that those who built the ideas were, in an essential way, citizens of the *civitas maxima* in which all the nations are no more than provinces. It is to their effort that we owe our freedom. Franklin Roosevelt was deeply conscious of that debt when he told the University of Pennsylvania: "Civilization owes most to the men and women, known and unknown, whose free, inquiring minds and restless intellects could not be subdued by the power of tyranny."

History has given special significance to those words since September 3, 1939. We have had experience that ought to make mankind never forget that power is not enough; we have also good reason to remember that no amount of scholarship will atone for the absence of wisdom. And wisdom comes when men and women have been so trained that not only is their thought free, but they themselves believe passionately that it ought to be free. If I may quote a Cambridge poet, it must have been of this freedom that Milton was thinking when he said "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book." It was the same poet who defined "a complete and generous education" as "that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." It is not excessive to say that this has been the great end upon which Oxford at her highest has always been set. Certainly it is right to affirm that in its fulfillment the Press has played an honorable and indispensable part. The Press has brought the University out of the cloister and enabled it to radiate its influence everywhere. The Press has made the wisdom of those whom Oxford has taught and who have taught her part of the central heritage of all mankind.

The foregoing article was delivered as an address at the recent dinner in New York which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the American branch of the Oxford University Press.





GROWING PAINS

ON the surface the American people are enduring a state of affluence in time of peace. The income of individuals has mounted to the colossal figure of 167 billions a year, 58 millions are employed and are spending out of earnings and savings 126 billion a year. Industrial production, profits from farms and businesses, are the highest in our history. The ten million veterans who today have found jobs are a denial of the wartime prophecies that they would by now be engaged in selling apples on street corners. We have won the Second World War, our enemies are as prostrate as we hoped they would be, and we are hanging and sentencing their war leaders and criminals as fast as international courts of justice can convict them. As a nation we possess vast military and naval strength, and we alone hold and continue to manufacture the most destructive weapon man has invented. We are the richest and most powerful of nations.

But already this rapid summary of our blessings seems stale and profitless, as if the end of hostilities a year and a few months ago had only served to plague us with a host of fears and neurotic ailments, as though we could only be strong and united in times of adversity and danger. A single issue of a city newspaper reveals the mounting burden of our woes. Crime and divorce are increasing; thousands of families are still homeless; prices are steadily climbing; meat, sugar, and other necessities are scarce; the stock market has steadily fallen. We are frightened at a strong foreign policy and afraid of a weak one. We are at the same time belligerent about Russia, and worried at the intransigence with which she continues to dominate the nations around

her vast perimeter. We boast about the strength of democratic institutions and secretly tremble at the idea of communism. We are handling the atomic bomb, to quote a caustic British journalist, "like a nervous, hysterical girl holding a hand grenade, not knowing when it will go off and not knowing what to do with it."

We are beginning to reveal the beginnings of a guilt complex that any psychiatrist will identify with the strain of puritanism that always lies under the surface of American behavior and thought. It was revealed after the First World War in the softening of our attitude toward Germany in the early twenties and our increasing distrust of the restrictive clauses of the Versailles Treaty, as if in some way we had to apologize to the Germans for having defeated them. It is showing itself now in the growing feeling that it was criminal of us to have used the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. You can also see it, if you care to look, in the indulgent and kindly manner with which so many who have been to Japan since it has been occupied now look at that apparently docile, charming, and patient people. The ape-like, long-toothed savages familiar in the wartime cartoons are becoming once more the picturesque and friendly little people we admired and neglected to worry about a few years ago.

You will look in vain among the responsible spokesmen to the British, or Heaven knows, the Russians for expressions of regret and doubt of this nature. This delicate post-facto squeamishness is a cherished possession of this country alone. We need not apologize for it, since it does not function only during the brutality of great wars. Our moral uneasiness about slavery was one of the causes for the Civil War and South and North our conscience is alive to the condition of the Negro in our society today.

Certainly no nation is more easily aroused to injustices and suffering around the world. It is only human nature that we prefer to have them as far away as possible so that we will try to feed a starving Hindu before we feel compelled to come to the relief of a sharecropper down South or a dispossessed Japanese out West. At least we seem to run little risk of ever becoming inwardly complacent as a country. It is no wonder that foreign observers who do not know us well are always confusing the outward symptom of our dissatisfaction with life with weakness and disunion. It would be interesting to study some day the reports in German and Japanese archives that led their diplomats and their bosses to the conviction that we were so turbulent and divided that we could be defeated in the Second World War. We have always had the gift of misleading our prospective enemies, though that is no reason why we should continue to fool ourselves.

It would be absurd to say that there is nothing to be alarmed about. We still live in a revolutionary and a sick world, in which almost anything can happen at any moment. But most of these manifestations of our restfulness are the result of the pains of growth and change. You can never ask of Americans that they should be satisfied with what they have won for themselves or what has been given to them. We must always want to have more and to know more. When we have acted ruthlessly to save ourselves, we are sorry, as a boy is when he has struck his friend in a fight. We have in some ways never grown up to the sedate, adult behavior of the European who has always had to weigh his decisions in time of peace against a host of fears and old inhibitions. We have always lacked reserve, always been youthful. Let us hope that we may never change. H. S.

September Signal

By Joseph Hirsh

WHEN drowsy days give way
To nights a little edged with chill and hoar,
'Tis time to note the warning signs
So subtly spaced:
The long hiatuses in song;
A smudge of blood-rust in the field;
The poplars and the beeches changing cloaks—
Patriarchal and gold;
The honeyed arms of other trees upturned,
To counsel some to flight
And some to pause.
Then on a single day, it seems
They raise their fiery arms to signal stop.
The interlude of green is gone.