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BEWILDERED PEOPLE

WE democratic people find ourselves bewildered. We are pricked by strange fears. Every man and woman seems, as never before in the history of the world, to feel an individual personal stake in the political restlessness which is making havoc in our peaceful lives.

Development of knowledge and the great number of our inventions complicate living. Conditions have been revolutionized for the better, and yet we are not happy. We may not be able to put into words the difficulties we feel, but we do know that life is for most of us a continuous process of getting used to things we hadn't expected.

Early settlers in America must have experienced something of this sort. They had to cope with strange animals, unfamiliar surroundings, extremes of climate, and the constant dread of Indians. Our ancestors, in prehistoric times, must have known fear as a constant feeling.

When we look back not so far, we take comfort in the thought that every formal, material ambition of the reformers, philanthropists and optimists of the nineteenth century has been achieved. They wanted to end slavery, lengthen life, raise the standard of living, establish free education. All these have been attained by the democracies of the West, but new things trouble us, from the high cost of living at home to the cheapness of human life in other countries.

We boast of our literacy, because more of us can read and write than ever before in history. The bugbear is that our newspaper headline knowledge of events has made us accustomed to crises. We are, too, subjected to learned expositions of various people's views on instincts, complexes, reflexes, glands and the traffic problem.

In all these experiences, we started out with ideals of what should be, but these have developed into frustration and then bewilderment. We find that compromises and adjustments have to be made, and we become confused as we try to keep the changes within the bounds of our principles and culture.

Life is Worth Living

Life can be worth living, and men, individually and as groups and as nations and as mankind, can find a satisfying purpose in it. Perfection and unchanging bliss are impossible and undesirable, but in the search for them we have romance, adventure, and the delight of doing things. Like Shakespeare's Guildenstern in *Hamlet*, we can be "Happy in that we are not overhappy; On fortune's cap we are not the very button."

We have made the word "progress" include a whole system of philosophy and politics. The civilization of our century allows the average man to partake lavishly of an abundance of things. He is surrounded by marvellous machines, healing arts, fatherly governments and comforting privileges of all kinds.

Should he become self-satisfied, it will be time for man to raise the question whether he and his culture are threatened with degeneration. Civilization does not emerge under unusually easy conditions of life. This is a law confirmed by palaeontology and bio-geography: human life has arisen and progressed only when the resources it could count on were balanced by the problems it met with.

Well, what about atomic power? It promises abundance as readily as desolation, but only on the condition that we solve the problem of its use. That solution involves the setting up of a principle and its embodiment in deeds. From some men and nations this will demand a healthy change from destructive impulses to constructive thinking.

Seeking a Principle

Where is the principle to be found that will appeal to all people? That is likely the most momentous question before us today. Of some things we can be certain, but they are mostly negative: a uniting principle is not to be found in nationalistic movements, political dogma, secular peace programmes or economic panaceas. The principle we seek must be ethical and universal, something appealing to the highest moral sense to which people of various cultures have

attained. It needs to be strong, if it is to overcome the obstacles which social usage and selfish impulses will put in the way of its cultivation.

No signatures on paper, and no outward rites can take the place of a true spiritual culture, which is described by Arnold J. Toynbee like this in his *Civilization on Trial*: "the inward force which alone creates and sustains the outward manifestations of what is called civilization."

Building on such a spiritual base does not mean that man will renounce the activities of life or stunt his natural faculties or scorn science and improvement. On the contrary, as was so eloquently said in the Encyclical Letter of Pope Pius XI in 1929, "He thus ennoble what is merely natural in life and secures for it new strength in the material and temporal order, no less than in the spiritual and eternal."

When the comfortable road of living at ease in a developing civilization has been remorselessly closed by a social breakdown, there are, says Toynbee, four ways presented as alternative possible by-passes. Three are culs-de-sac, and "only one, which we have called transfiguration, and illustrated by the light of Christianity, leads right onward."

Why are we Confused?

It may be well to ask, in view of this knowledge and our ability in the sciences and our skill in technical things, why are we confused?

Is it because no one knows toward what centre human beings are going to gravitate, and therefore our lives have become scandalously makeshift? Everything that is done today by governments and by individuals seems provisional, depending on this or that factor outside their control.

Are we confused because we have been installed at birth in the midst of riches and prerogatives unknown to any other age or to any other form of human society? We did nothing to create them, and we have to live up to them, with all their new perplexities. It is a plain fact that the abundance of resources we inherit as Canadians of 1951 deprives us of the chance to live out our personal destiny by struggle and effort. Struggle and effort were commonplace as the inspiration of Canadians a century ago.

Is our confusion due to the fact that we take so great personal interest in all other people that life is a long-continued tension, so that we fidget and become irritated by little things?

Or can it be that our confusion arises from a feeling of aloneness on a desolate sea, cut off from help and comfort? That is horrible indeed. As the Shepards say in their recent novel *Jenkins' Ear*: "Many men, many women, have sung and rejoiced in the midst of the flames because they felt that their torment was known somewhere, that it would count, that it had a meaning. But to feel that it means nothing whatever . . . Well, you remember Byron's outcry: 'That way, madness lies!'"

Something about Fear

It is natural to be afraid, and our fears may range from the atom bomb to the unknown. The man who tells you he has no fears acknowledges that he has no imagination. Mystery is often at the root of fear, and another way of saying "mystery" is to refer to it as our consciousness of ignorance. When we don't know the form of a danger, though we know it is there, that is more tormenting than any discovery, however frightful.

Some of our fears are much too big for the kind of situation that appears to arouse them, but the only sure way to make certain we are not fearing unnecessarily is to find out. If the conduct of others causes our fear emotion to arise, let's find out the worst they can do and then react intelligently. If we are afraid because we don't know what another person means, let's ask and ask until we find out — otherwise our nagging fear may develop into hatred.

It is useless to shut our eyes to dangers. Often we do not tremble because we are afraid, but we are afraid because we let ourselves tremble. The curative quality in letting in the light is shown roughly by Ibsen in one of his plays. Björn asks: "Are you afraid of a dark room?" And Finn replies: "Not in the daytime."

There are other things besides fear that cause us to be bewildered people. One of the greatest sources of confusion is our individuality. We humans differ in our heredity, our up-bringing, and our desires. The people who jostle one another on our streets are inevitably different. No amount of education can make the extrovert really understand the introvert, or the talker understand the man who finds all his satisfaction in solitary handicraft, or the non-musical person feel with the passion of the music lover. This diversity may be the salt of life, but it can be confusing.

The high-minded person will not merely tolerate the peculiarities of others, but will enjoy them. He will hold in respect the rights and privileges of every individual; he will listen to both sides of an argument; he will put up with things beloved by others which are distasteful to him. Such a spirit will go a long way toward removing the bewilderment caused by the idiosyncrasies of neighbours, business acquaintances, and people half a world away.

Ways of Escape

In the midst of these confusions, several ways of escape are offered us. There are times when we become homesick for our comparatively carefree past. As Mary Lowrey Ross wrote in *Saturday Night* last month about grandmother: "In all her lifetime she had never heard of communists or nuclear fission or sacroiliac disturbance or supersonic flight. I don't know that I would care to go back to my grandmother's era to live. But it would be a wonderful place to visit."

Psychiatry, which is the medical discipline dedicated to the treatment of psychologically sick persons, has begun to be considered by some as something that

could ultimately cure groups, nations and the human race as a whole of such "illnesses" as wars, inter-racial tensions and suchlike.

But let not these people remove the things we cling to in our bewilderment before they have provided better things to take their place. They have no colour of reason for taking away our handholds in these slippery days, without giving the ordinary people of the world more secure footing.

Social science is trying to find the answers to our great unanswered questions: how can we get peace, freedom, order, prosperity and progress under many different states of existence? How can we establish the conditions of human well-being that have been attained in some parts of the world, or by certain groups, so that they will apply to other groups, and to other parts of the world? How can we achieve general agreement of minds in a mass democracy? How can we get the advantages of a rapidly developing technology without destroying the other values we cherish? These are questions proposed by Dr. Louis Wirth, of Chicago University.

Governments, as well as social scientists, have their responsibilities, but governments are all too often concerned only with political "facts." This is symptomatic of a trend among some people to stop thinking of what governments should be, and to think only of what governments can do for them. By this route people lose control of government by becoming its beneficiaries. And people voting themselves into Eden from a supposedly inexhaustible government purse are no match for the confusions of today.

It would be beneficial if as energetic efforts were made by governments to improve men as are put forth to improve men's condition. It would be worth more to people and country to instil one single principle than to provide all the ease of living possible.

Understanding One Another

We have only a few short years to develop instruments of national and international understanding. One hindrance is the difficulty of communicating ideas. This doesn't mean merely the handicap of language, though that is a big one, but we feel discomfited because we don't know where and how to say all that is in our minds — and sometimes the right people aren't listening.

Talking of our failure to communicate ideas with any degree of satisfactory results, Wendell Johnson writes in *People in Quandaries* that from the day when we arrived with bewildering suddenness in the Atomic Age the problem has become urgent to the point of sheer desperation. "The race against destruction has now become a sprint," he says. "The next time words fail, millions of us will die, having discovered a second or two beforehand, if at all, how extremely advantageous it would have been had we learned how to talk to other people and how to listen to them."

Mr. Johnson doubtless had the menace of totalitarianism in his mind when he wrote his warning. It is by the minds of men that the work of ages may be made to crumble in the dust, and the minds of dictators have no use for those things our forefathers built which we consider so greatly worth while.

To the dictator, sentiment, pity, fairness, charity, spiritual thoughts: all these are an encumbrance, and only cruelty and brutality are efficient tools. Despotic governments dislike dreamers, holy men, thinkers and philosophers. The fascination of power leads them to tear down. As Thomas Campbell, the Scottish poet, wrote: "What millions died, that Caesar might be great!"

Out of the horribleness that is communism there is one question that bewilders us more than all others: why do the people in communistic countries suffer this succession of unnecessary miseries at the hands of their leaders? We cannot see in the communistic system any increase in human happiness: on the contrary, it carries with it degradation, misery, a cattle-like subservience to masters, and starvation of men's minds.

The Values We Believe In

We of the democracies believe that there is a scale of values in life, from the simplest comforts of everyday living right up to the highest satisfactions of love, virtue, intellect and creative achievement. We find an innate satisfaction in looking for the true and the noble. We believe in duty: duty to one's family, one's country, and one's self.

We of the democracies believe in freedom. From our moral liberty is derived our right to political liberty, and our duty to keep it inviolate.

We believe in giving our people the right and the means to pursue knowledge in this age of intellectual curiosity. Intelligent human beings will never long be satisfied with animal pleasures. For them the pleasures of the intellect and emotions come first: "To be still searching what we know not, by what we know; still closing up truth to truth as we find it, this is the golden rule."

Some persons love to quote a proverb in excuse for their ignorance: "A little learning is a dangerous thing." Much more than a little wisdom, a lot of ignorance is a dangerous thing. Ignorance trips us into situations that would be funny in an individual but are tragic in a nation. One clown slipping on a banana peel is a joke, but one world slipping on an ideology seems pretty grim.

Increase of knowledge by ever so little will help us to avoid prejudice and superstition. The most frightening thing in the world is to be at the mercy of someone who is so stupid as not to be amenable to reason. Next to that is the subject of the Arabian proverb: "He that knows not, and knows not that he knows not — he is a fool, shun him."

From gathering knowledge to thinking is but a short step. Thinking is not a lazy, idle, passive mental occupation. It is strenuous work of the intellect, and its aim is understanding. It may begin by upsetting our complacency. As we compare this with that we may find relationships and differences we did not know existed.

There are three steps in thinking: collecting the facts through observation or experience; explaining them tentatively by an hypothesis or an "informed guess"; confirming this hypothesis by patient observation. This method leaves no room for taking things for granted, or for jumping to conclusions on the basis of hearsay (which, we must remember, may be prejudiced or coloured).

Don't Give in to Chaos

If there is any clarion note to be sounded in the democracies today it is this: "Don't give in to chaos." We must not allow ourselves to become so accustomed to the lower tone of the existence we are at present compelled to live that we lose the virtues and capacities we have so hardly won.

It would be fatal, indeed, if we allowed ourselves to think of the present state of unrest as normal.

It is no easy job to tidy up our intellectual and spiritual universe, but we need to do it if we are to avoid bewilderment and to escape chaos, if we are not to allow all of our generations of progress to be whittled down to destruction by an era of violence and terror.

Realization of what is happening and that we should do something about it are the first steps out of bewilderment. Like the dice-player, we cannot tell what may be thrown; but carefully and skilfully to make use of what is thrown, that is where our proper business begins.

Joseph Mazzini writes bitterly of people who see their principles trampled without taking effective action to save them: "They lifted for a moment their drowsy heads, and then fell back into their old torpor. They saw the funeral procession of our martyrs pass by, knew not that their rights, their life, their salvation, were being buried with them."

There are no clear-cut prescriptions that will apply immediately to our particular headaches. Having learned and thought, we need to associate ourselves with others dedicated to serving the high principles in which we believe.

We need to become not only patrons but active participants, perhaps not in big things, but in the innumerable little ways that in the aggregate make up our way of life. Naaman's servants said to him, as recorded in II Kings: "If the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he saith to thee 'wash, and be clean'?"

Little things must be considered important, just as we must guard against the outstanding weakness of democracy: a sense of the insignificance of personal effort in national and international affairs. But very often the fate of society has turned upon something trivial. A Greek philosopher went so far as to suggest that if Menelaus had been sensible about Helen, and had made up his mind he was just as well rid of such a wife, there would have been no thousand ships launched, and no battle of Troy.

There are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people, and our democratic way of life offers greater scope than any other for their development. Practically all of the great discoveries and inventions of modern times made their first appearance among people whose governments left them free to develop themselves according to their own desires.

What is our Philosophy?

Everyone needs a philosophy of life, and possibly there may be one hammered out of this far-reaching though inadequate survey of today's state of the world and its bewildered people. Surely, it may be said, there has never been another condition of life so well suited for philosophizing as this in which we now happen to be.

Essential to a constructive philosophy is the question "Where do we go from here?" That is more progressive than seeking to answer the question "Why ever did we come here?" Every step we take forward is a gain, not only in terms of ground gained but because we then obtain a better view of what lies ahead. No writer has said this better than H. G. Wells in *World Set Free*: "Man lives in the dawn for ever. Life is beginning and nothing else but beginning. It begins everlastingly. Each step seems vaster than the last, and does but gather us for the next."

Of all important countries in the world today, Canada has the least reason for a mood of self-pity. During the past half-century we have ceased to be a provincial outpost of Europe. We have become an important participant in world affairs. We have passed from the primitiveness of the material background that our French and British pioneers knew in their childhood to a sophistication that was then unthinkable.

Not everyone will agree that these things are necessarily good. There is something extravagant to the simple mind in the contour of our destiny as pictured by some orators and writers. But the fact remains that we are where we are, with a high standard of living, high ideals, high ethical principles, and a sturdy citizenry. We believe in simple kindness, common honesty, the beauty in family life, and the rule of law.

We believe, too, that the shuttle which flies backward and forward across the loom of Time is bringing into existence a tapestry in which these virtues form the pattern. We are content to contribute our part to weaving that tapestry.