



THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

MONTHLY LETTER

VOL. 49, No. 4

HEAD OFFICE: MONTREAL, APRIL 1968

In the Long Run

EVERYTHING HERE AND NOW counts in the long run. Ecologists tell us that not a leaf falls in the forest or a raindrop into the sea but that the consequences of each happening must go on for all time and spread through all space.

Young people in Canada have the opportunity to make their todays count in their future. Education and opportunity are provided, and what young people are to become through their aid they are now becoming.

No one can tell another how to live so as to come out best in the long run, but it is possible to mention certain things that will help a youth toward learning for himself. One thing is certain: you do not find life worth living: you have to *make* it worth living. That requires all the ardour of which you are capable. Given an ideal, you may make of your life what you will, with good tools, good materials and determination.

What do you want ?

It is surprising how few stand in the way of an ambitious person. There are many who wish for things, of course, but only those who work toward them count as rivals. The man who is content to draw his pay and arrive home in time to catch his favourite six o'clock programme on his television set is not a competitor: he is one who stands in his own light and wonders why his life is so dull.

Ambition is not a rare gift which some have and others do not. It comes to you as the result of prompting your imagination to consider what might be. It sparks the healthy-minded man to seek opportunities to exercise his capacities.

An effort is needed toward the "more" that life has to offer. Eating, drinking, sleeping, playing — these are mere accessories to living. In these respects we are not different from the brutes.

Having a purpose gives meaning to what human beings do. You cannot play football effectively unless you know where the goal line is. You cannot play the human game without right aspirations, leading you toward durable accomplishments. It was said by Wil-

liam James, the philosopher: "The great use of a life is to spend it for something that will outlast it."

Having assessed your potentialities, proceed in such a way that at the end of your career you will feel that you have approximated in achievement the possibilities you now see in your life.

A very fine sort of ambition is to try to beat the record you made yesterday; to excel yourself. One of the greatest hindrances you can put in the way of progress is to cheat your mind by imagining that you have done your best. You must not mistake insubstantial dreams for realities.

The Celestial City in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was not a delightful dream city, but a real place to be reached through danger, toil, and resistance to counter-attractions. Throughout the journey, the pilgrim enjoyed his expectations.

What succeeds is this: to have aspirations, to gain knowledge, to be enthusiastic, and to work. Your liking for the long run result will assuage the toil and hardship of reaching it, but you need to put the full sweep of your effort into every job you tackle.

Do you seek fame ?

Few people are self-sufficient. They need appreciation of what they are doing. It may not be public acclaim, which is distasteful to some. What everyone needs is understanding of his purpose and effort, and a sharing of his feeling that the work of his hands, whether beautiful or useful, is important.

To seek fame is not an ignoble ambition, but fame for what? In the Tuileries Garden in Paris is a sculpture depicting a horseman sounding a trumpet: its title is "Fame". To hear a fanfare, to see your name in lights on a theatre or in type on a book jacket: these may be evidence of renown. But behind the fanfare and the lights and the type there must be solid achievement, and that is the reality to you.

Look back over history and note how few whose names were on people's lips have survived this test of quality: how small today is their fame that was then so

great. Rank, pomp, titles and splendour are insubstantial. As Plutarch wrote of Caesar: "he reaped no other fruits than the empty name and invidious glory."

Setting aside the struggle for pomp and titles and money-bags does not mean yielding to the temptation of indolence, perhaps calling laziness by some high-sounding name like "unworldliness". It means seeing where your true life happiness lies. Then you will take applause as an incident along the way to cheer you in your effort.

What is happiness?

In the long run you seek happiness. But there are different kinds of happiness. Two philosophers argued. Socrates stood for felicity as the supreme happiness, and the sophist for desiring and getting. The sophist said that Socrates' felicity was that of a block of wood; Socrates said his antagonist's bliss was that of a man who had the itch, who did nothing but scratch.

If someone asks you "Are you happy?" do not look into your stock of worldly goods, or into your pay envelope, or into your notoriety, but into your work. A man is made happier by doing things rather than by having delectable things wrapped in cellophane and laid on his knee. Goethe says in his *Wilhelm Meister*: "The man who is born with a talent which he is meant to use finds his greatest happiness in using it."

As for greatness, do not think for a moment that distinction falls upon one: it has to be earned. Success is not something in itself, but the adjunct of doing something well. It is not attained through hunting in packs or demonstrating in mobs. It is the outcome of an individual summing up a situation and applying personal effort toward solving a problem.

To be accounted great, a man must contribute. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. The man seeking to be great has set himself the task of leaving some advantage to mankind behind him. In doing so he has pride of achievement; he is one of an elite based upon attainment.

Youth need not wait

The chief advantage in being young is that one has time to learn, but there is no need to wait for manhood if you have a good idea. Many young people just out of high school are wading into their life-work up to their necks. Some get hold of an idea which has long been supposed to be dead, or has never been thought of, and it comes to life in their hands.

Dr. William Carleton Gibson, Professor of the History of Medicine and Science at the University of British Columbia, has written a book to inspire every youth. He calls it *Young Endeavour* (C. C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., and Ryerson, Toronto). It tells about the contributions to science by medical undergraduate students during the past four centuries.

What could be its keynote is quoted by Dr. Gibson from Dr. John Shaw Billings, who "as an undergradu-

ate made a discovery which influenced the lives of more potential medical discoverers than any other single development in medical literature." Here is what Billings wrote: "Some people contemplate a task until it looms so big it seems impossible. But I just begin, and it gets done somehow. There would be no coral islands if the first bug sat down and began to wonder how the job was to be done."

Many things learned early in life will be useful one day in the future though they are not immediately exchangeable for goods and services. They are the laws which phenomena obey. Life is not a war of bugle calls and roaring engines and magnificent displays, but a patient, enduring, ingenious application or modification of known laws so as to meet new situations and cope with new problems.

Such a life is like a candid camera: it takes you as you are. You need, therefore, to know what you are, and a spot of self-assessment is indicated. You must be able to tell the truth frankly to yourself about your capacity, your ambition, your tastes, and the amount and strength of determination you possess.

If you do not make this survey you may fail to build a frame big enough to contain the picture you are capable of painting. Just as an oyster is ignorant of the value of its pearl, you may go through life with assets unrevealed.

Your object in filling the frame with a worthy picture is to satisfy yourself. You will be a sterner critic than are those who pass judgment on your work. You seek substance in your accomplishments, and that is to be obtained by showing intelligence in your appreciation of yourself, initiative in getting started toward what you believe yourself capable of achieving, and sustained interest in what you are doing.

In this self-appraisal, do not accept limitations unless you are sure that there is no way open to you by which you may break through by thought and effort.

If you have already passed the years of youth, you have still time to reappraise. There is no reason why the urge to excel should die with youth. A music critic writing about the 91-year-old Pablo Casals not long ago said: "Each year of his miraculous old age, Pablo Casals undergoes a renewal, a heroic enlargement of the human spirit."

Knowledge plus experience

More important in the long run than a high standard of living is a high standard of thinking.

The love of study derives fresh vigour from its enjoyment. This is particularly true to the man who recognizes that education is not merely the road to earning a living but the gateway to knowledge which makes living worthwhile.

As knowledge grows, so does vision. There are primitive people to whom a hundred miles is an inconceivably great distance; business men in recent years think nothing of travelling thousands of miles

in a day; astronauts contemplate a million mile flight with equanimity. A subject mastered through study is a vantage point from which to attack those at a greater distance and on more commanding heights.

The prime purpose of attending high school or university is to gather the materials that will enable you to get on with your purpose in life. Anything else is irrelevant.

Then you embark on experience. At school you learned universal principles: through experience you learn their application in individual cases.

Experience need not be a passive thing in which you wait for something to happen to you. The word stems from "experiri" — to try out. You can make experiences happen by experimenting.

Train your mind to classify facts and to associate new facts with old, so that it provides you at any moment of need with a coherent whole of resource material. Take advantage of every instructive example, thus learning how to deal with complexity. Put experiences to use. Wagner wrote many operas, but if he had not sailed through a storm while crossing the North Sea he might never have thought of "The Flying Dutchman."

Taking advice is something in the nature of getting experience without going through events. There is a certain futility about the man who refuses to seek and take prudent advice given by people who know what they are talking about. It is, of course, not right to seek advice in the spirit of having someone to blame if something goes wrong.

Get into the game

No one wins a race or a sporting event of any other sort unless he enters the competition. Medals are not awarded to people who sit on the side-lines telling how a game should be played.

Your start may be small, but no beginning is so small that continued application will not make it considerable. Herein lies the virtue of initiative: to think of something worthwhile to do and get it rolling.

It is not an easy thing to make up your mind definitely about what to choose out of life's many offerings, but you are not going to get good snapshots by aiming at the landscape generally. Colin Wilson states the question gravely in his book *The Outsider*: "How must I live my life so as not to have to consider myself a failure?"

One thing to be done early in your planning is borrowed from science, economics and sociology: you have to formulate a satisfactory balance between the ends you desire to attain and the price you are willing to pay. Young people entering the working world often do not analyse the whole proposition. Like a man in love they allow themselves to be captivated by the seemingly superior advantages offered to attract them.

It is not a mark of realism merely to have a lofty aim. You need to make as sure as you can that you will find

what you really want on the heights you plan to climb. There is undoubted advantage in having alternatives. Look along many roads in order to pick the right one, and have some large strategic view within which you will make use of sharp-sighted tactical plans.

When you have set the course of your life as you see it now, that is a practical start. You will be surprised by the unfolding of new possibilities. Dr. P. B. Medawar, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1960, said this: "The greatest liberation of thought achieved by the scientific revolution was to have given human beings a sense of a future in this world."

Keep going

You will take each step with all the wisdom you can muster, wisdom composed of attention to the circumstances, of data gathered from other people and from your own experience, all carefully considered in the light of your desire and your environment. At every point you must earn the right not only to move up, but to stay where you are. Napoleon put the matter of fitness in this way: "The tools to him that can handle them."

Every move forward demands that you make some adjustment to new situations. If you are to grow into something big and worthwhile it is important to preserve your ability to change. You may even need a carefully planned transfer to a new setting. This is a matter for careful reappraisal, taking into account your original purpose in life, the changes in conditions, and the new facts you have learned. To change course after deliberate thought is not defeat, but progress based upon experience and widened knowledge.

You need a tendency to persevere in whatever you have set your hand to. Making good calls for keeping going toward your objective. The successful people around you did not reach their goal by weaving from side to side seeking novelty and pursuing pleasure, but by persistent effort along their planned route.

It is a mistake of the first order to confuse a wobbly backbone with a flexible policy. A mind suspended doubtfully between different motives and plans changes its direction according to the strength of the competing objectives. You need a certain dogged application to the task of the day, but your imagination will turn diligence into enjoyable perseverance.

Always have something in reserve, a store of power not used. You never know when a little extra pull will see you through a muddy place. Though you cannot lift yourself by your bootstraps with a steady pull, there may come a time when newly-tapped energy expended through a series of properly-timed jerks will free your feet.

All of this requires a patient mind. Patience is not a passive virtue. It is the product of intelligent desire for something good in the long run and the willingness to wait while working toward it. In the mountains, said a

German philosopher, the shortest way is from peak to peak, but for that route you must have long legs.

Accept adversity

The road is not closed simply because you have failed to advance in a particular field. Do not stop believing in what you are seeking without a very good reason, reached after mature deliberation on all the facts, and competent counsel. You will gather up the fragments that remain of your plan, and interpret and put to use the lesson the failure teaches. The disappointment may be wholesome medicine, stirring you to new effort. We read of a young man who failed his matriculation examination but pulled himself together and won the university medal when he graduated.

It is not so much the things that happen as your thoughts about them that matter, and you can control your thoughts even if you cannot control happenings.

Prince Philip said in an address: "I remember many expeditions when I was miserably uncomfortable, bored, wet, sick, sore and tired out; quite willing to give the whole thing up. Funnily, the worse they were, the more I relish them in retrospect. You only live to regret times you gave up."

Everybody is entitled to meet with some adversity as a spur to action. A biographer said of Goldsmith: "Given all his time free from bailiffs and taskmasters, it is to be doubted whether he would ever have written anything of note whatever."

You will be subject to some uncertainties. How does a sculptor know that a statue is hidden in the block of marble? He sees it in his mind, and he chips away with his chisel and mallet until the masterpiece stands revealed. Of course, if he did not try he could not be charged with failure, and that might be a satisfaction to timid souls.

You will encounter problems. Is there anything else that gives stimulus to living? The thing to do is not to meet a problem in an excited way, but to define its dimensions at once. How important is it in itself? How could it affect your life ambition if solved this way or that way?

You will not seek, but neither will you shun, collision and disturbance. They are natural in our environment and must be lived with. It is impossible to make progress in government, business, or a profession without incurring risk. One must sometimes leave off taking precautions in order to reach a clear-cut result.

Perceptivity is a big help in every situation we encounter. It is not enough to see the shell of things. As you move around the object — which is a good thing to do — you get a complete view of it from the outside. When you enter into an object you get to know it from the inside out, and to understand it.

We are slow to recognize the necessity of mental growth, which, unlike physical growth, requires conscious purpose. We need to keep enriching our minds.

Even if you are, for the present, in a job that has only rubber-stamp and carbon-paper action, you should be exercising your brain. A man does not live meanly if he cultivates the love of mental adventure. The world in which we move is various and astonishing, offering escape from the commonplace, and the opportunity to feel at home in the wide realm of ideas.

To walk alone

And so, you reach maturity. Maturity implies the ability to walk alone. You have mastered the daily routine of living. Here is the occasion to put away childish things such as the inability to sustain interest until a task is completed. That belongs to the time of life when the immediate moment is the only real moment, and there is only rudimentary realization of the importance of the long run.

Something of philosophy, of thought, must be combined with hurrying youthful self-assertion before you can emerge from impetuosity into wisdom. Then you have mature thinking, mature emotions, and mature doing.

If this year catches you far past graduation, there is no need to look back upon youth as Atlantis, the Lost Land. Youth had its purposes, serving you now in maturity. It was impulsive, but it gave you discernment; it was rash, but it fitted you to give counsel; it tackled new jobs, but it qualified you for settled business.

Seasoned judgment, for which every man hopes, is the sum of knowledge plus experience plus new knowledge, one building upon and extending the other. It does not necessarily put a damper on your aspirations, but it is flexible, adaptable, and sagacious, with enough self-confidence to run risks if they seem worth running. You know how to distinguish fact from fancy, to see through nonsense, to reject false doctrines, and to behave in a reasonable way so that restraints do not have to be imposed upon you.

Believe in yourself

Belief in yourself today is necessary to your success and happiness in the long run. Studying today, working today, planning today: these have real consequences tomorrow.

Life is a succession of challenges, and it would clearly be unwise to count on an easy run. Recall Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York: "I am not your king till I be crowned."

Nothing should be allowed to destroy hope of a good outcome earnestly sought. All that has made man great has sprung from the hope of securing what was good, and not from the struggle to avoid what was thought to be bad.

This is a most inspiring thought: that you will win your place in the world by no man's favour, but by your own intelligently-directed effort.