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A Conspectus for Youth

IT IS REASONABLE that young people should seek assurance that their lives shall have meaning and purpose and that they count as real persons.

This *Conspectus* is a survey designed to help them to plot a course so that they may avoid the plight of Hamlet, cast loose from firm anchorage, trying vainly to find a peaceful harbour in a turbulent ocean. It may help them to avoid his disillusionment and despair.

Young people's ambitions differ from those of the old go-getter type, because they are tired of conflict and seek above all else to establish warm, sound human relations.

They find society at a critical, uneasy point in its history. They are disturbed by the prospect of a dehumanized technological culture. Many of them are seeking the answers to questions that troubled their grandparents. They are asking: how can we get peace, freedom, order, prosperity and progress under the many states of existence in many nations? How can we establish world-wide the conditions of human well-being that have been attained in some parts? How can we enjoy the advantages of a rapidly-developing technology without destroying the other values we cherish?

There is small profit to be had from exhausting our minds and feelings in pitying ourselves for being born into an upset world.

When we set out to put things right, we need to realize that people are not, by and large, obstructive, but merely confused about themselves and their role. But we cannot plan to straighten out others' future until we have drawn up a plan for our own lives, and for this the best counsellor is under our own hair.

Whatever criticism may be made of some features of life in Canada today, it is beyond doubt that we have high ideals, high ethical principles, and a high standard of living. We believe in simple kindness, the beauty in family life, and the rule of law. These are good ideals to have in mind when becoming an independent member of society, but the ideas need to be converted into actualities.

Essential to a constructive philosophy is the answer

to the question: "How do we go about accomplishing what we wish to do?" Some things have to be corrected, but correcting them does not necessarily mean that we must create an upheaval. We do the things that are within our power. Naaman was angry with the prophet for saying that to be cured of leprosy all he need do was wash in the River Jordan. His servants said to him: "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he saith to thee: 'Wash and be clean'?"

When we start to clean up our intellectual and spiritual universes we shall find that it would be a mistake indeed to concentrate on one aspect of life to the exclusion of others. It would be unrewarding to submerge sentiment, pity, fairness, charity and spiritual thoughts while pursuing economic gains, or to brush aside the necessities of life while thinking deep philosophical thoughts.

Life's tensions

Personal confusion is caused by the fact that young people today take so great a personal interest in other people all over the globe that life is a long-continued tension.

This is something that did not afflict their parents, whose boundaries of personal involvement were limited. We are subject today to the newspaper and television and radio reports of starvation, flood, storm and war, so that we are accustomed to crises and we live as if critical living were the only way.

Everyone feels that he is involved in what is happening everywhere. He is perplexed about economic conditions at home and political disturbances abroad; about the depletion of non-renewable natural resources on earth and the potentialities of spy- or bomb-carrying vehicles in space.

Young people are subjected as never before to the broadcasting of people's opinions on instincts, complexes, reflexes, glands, behaviour, sex, and daily worries from war to the traffic problem.

Transition to new ways is in the air. Some people

set out to change things as if that were their mission in life. Like the ancient knights, they seek to be heroic slayers of dragons.

Other people sincerely believe, judging by what they see and hear around them, that a destructive phase must be gone through before a truly great human society can come into being.

Most people have the feeling that before you disaffiliate yourself from the beliefs that gave society its structure in the past, you need to found a new structure upon which to rely for the support that every human being requires.

Proposals for improvement of any sort need to be positive, pointing the way to remedial action. There may be for some persons a delight in sitting around amid negative speculations, crying over spilt milk, but the positive person will be busy mopping up the milk and getting a new bottle.

Nearly everyone knows of something that is wrong or something desirable that is missing. The evidence of maturity is that we show the patience and the fortitude necessary to find the way to set things right.

Changing people's minds

To change conditions for the better we need to change people's minds. A celebrated English churchman said: "It is useless for the sheep to pass resolutions in favour of vegetarianism while the wolf remains of a different opinion." We need to persuade society to pay the price of revitalization, including abandonment of customs that are not applicable to a computerized world and acceptance of changes that are made necessary by the new mobility of ideas and of people.

Change is usually more acceptable to the young than to the old. There is an experience gap between the old and the young; they are measuring events against varying scales. In all his long life grandfather never heard of nuclear power or sacroiliac disturbance or supersonic flight, and all he knew about a visit to the moon was what Jules Verne told him. On the other hand, young people have not lived through world wars and depressions.

Young people believe that their elders put up with a great many evils in order to avoid the trouble of abolishing them. That is not universally so. The older people have grown up under these conditions and are so accustomed to them that they do not notice them or feel affected by them. Think of the way in which one becomes used to a torn place in the hall rug so that he steps over it without being aware of it.

Young people are impatient to make things happen according to their desires: older people are fretful when things do not turn out in accord with their expectations. Looked at in this way, the generation gap does not seem a frightening chasm but only a dip that can be bridged by a little tolerant understanding pushed out from both sides.

On your own

Graduation day may seem to some persons like crossing a date-line on a cruise ship: nothing has perceptibly changed. But it has changed for you: yesterday you were a student under school discipline and guidance; today you are a person on your own.

It is a significant moment when a young person realizes that from here on he will walk his own path and will cope with emergencies as they arise. Not everyone has a guardian angel to whisper in his ear what he should do or which turning he should take.

Life has a sharper edge when you are on your own, and it is honed to a fine point by the knowledge that you alone are responsible for what happens. Before appearing at the Grand Assize everyone must stand before the judgment of his own mind all through his life.

The real joy in life is doing things that show some wholesome result. Competition with others for place and prestige has a great appeal, but the most challenging ambition is to excel yourself year after year.

Make an honest try at finding a purpose in life worthy of you, fitting your intellect and skill. The person who has as his main objectives material things like hi-fi, sports car, *de luxe* home furnishings and the manic monotony of Rock and Roll, has set a low ceiling on his culture and his intelligence.

Having a solid purpose, a sense of wanting to do something to justify your being on the scene, gives your mind unity of drive toward accomplishment. This is far from the lazy-brained idea of a few that we are here just to enjoy ourselves with light pleasures.

Common sense tells us that drifting from interest to interest is an unprofitable way to live. You may have a dozen interests, but there is one that is central. Define it, make it your main goal, organize your efforts and use your resources to make sure that it is kept healthy and growing. When your mind is exposed to the strong contagion of a great desire, that can be the beginning of a great attainment.

Conflicting ambitions are unlikely to yield satisfactory returns. If you invented a solvent that would dissolve any solid substance and a universal container which would hold any liquid, you would be back where you started.

You become a superior person only by preparing to be superior. Ambition to hear yourself spoken of is folly, but to be noticed for something worthy is admirable. The shortest cut to arrive at glory is to be in reality what you wish to be accounted.

Far removed from achievement that gives satisfaction is mediocrity. This inferior, lazy attitude does not appeal to a young man or young woman who has spirit and self-confidence. Self-confidence is not at all the same thing as self-satisfaction. Confidence means being capable of doing things: satisfaction means feeling happy with things as they are.

Self-confidence is perilously fragile unless it is based

upon valid knowledge of your powers and awareness of your weaknesses. It is wise to check, once in a while, the bases of your belief in your capability to handle situations. There may be gaps to fill in and weaknesses to strengthen.

Take a broad view

It is inspiring to look out over the whole broad world of human activities, seeing things in their vast magnitude and true proportions. This helps to build a mind that is accustomed to thinking big while paying attention to the small.

Taking a comprehensive view does not mean making a list of all the things that need doing in the world. There is not enough paper for that and your lifetime is not long enough.

The thing to do is make a note of needed things that are in your power to provide and of improvements to which you can contribute. Get the big picture, examine it in its parts, and decide where your life work fits in.

During your survey, do not become immersed immediately in details of any one project. Imagine yourself on the moon examining the earth through a telescope that has several lenses. First you examine all the world in two sightings as the hemispheres change places. Where are there things to be done for the betterment of human life? Change lenses so that you see only Canada in your eyepiece. What, particularly, do you see that needs doing in this country? Change to a lens with a still smaller range so that your own environment fills the field of view. This is where you start your crusade.

The next step takes you away from your moon-based telescope and places you squarely in your own mind. Here is where projects take form, here is where interest leads to action, here is where your life plan is made or marred.

The need to know

The best laid plans are based on knowledge. Approval is given in these days to the person who has "know how", but knowing how is a small accomplishment compared with that of the person who knows why. "Know how" can be learned by hand-work on the job; "know why" is head-work.

If you lack knowledge of the background, present conditions, possible future, and, above all, the purpose of a movement or a job, you cannot rise above routine; you cannot develop your dynamic potentiality.

Knowledge is your principal resource, to be acquired with discrimination and stored up so that it contributes to progress in your business or profession.

This is a crucial point. You must keep up your knowledge of "know how" and "know why" or you do not know enough to make changes, improvements and advancement. Edward Hodnett wrote in *The Art*

of Problem Solving: "Failure to accept this hard truth will put you among the half-baked artists, crank inventors, political dreamers, and fakers in all fields, who find it easier to be different than to master the fundamentals from which they are deviating."

How is knowledge acquired? You are not well-informed by inheritance, instinct or intuition, but by learning facts and weaving them together by thought. One cannot think, much less develop new ideas, unless one has units of comparison. These are obtained through personal perception and from the experience of other people.

Everyone's knowledge would be very limited indeed if we could only acquire it through our own observation of events. As it is, we can turn to writers who have written about their experiences in every sphere of activity in science and thought.

Knowledge is not something in itself like an ornament to display: it is for use. Without self-expression founded upon acquired knowledge we are mere fragments of what men and women might be. Alfred North Whitehead expressed this well when he referred to "activity in the presence of knowledge."

Knowledge stored in our minds gives us material with which to think, and it also provides information about how to do things. A craftsman knows how to select the tools appropriate to the job in hand, and how to use them. A crow-bar is not designed to enable us to raise something rapidly, but to raise or move what is heavy. That is knowledge in use. The answer to a difficult problem in engineering a bridge may be found in Euclid's geometry, but the bridge will not be built by the man who can recite Euclid by heart: he must have the ability to apply the principles to the case in hand.

It often happens that there comes into mind an idea which is merely a blurred picture of something that might be, or of something that we might do. We know that the idea is good, but we must relate it to knowledge we already have, add new knowledge, and bring the picture into focus before we can snap the shutter.

A well-rounded person

One does not move in a purely physical world, dealing solely with blue-prints and machines. There are three phases of life to bring into balance: physical, mental and moral.

Everyone finds himself at some time seeking the answers to profound questions. As Herbert Spencer wrote in *First Principles*: "At the uttermost reach of discovery there arises the question 'What lies beyond?' and as it is impossible to think of a limit to space so as to exclude the idea of space lying outside that limit, so we cannot conceive of any explanation profound enough to exclude the question: 'What is the explanation of that explanation?'"

Nevertheless we have to give attention to immediate needs. Desire and energy and speculation must be brought into relation with daily life lest while we walk

with our eyes on the stars we collide with some hard fact like a speeding automobile.

Among the things we need are principles, underlying ideas, controlling concepts, and action.

There is something satisfying in the signal sent to a newly-commissioned warship: "Being in all respects ready for sea, H.M.S. *Youth* will proceed . . ." While seeing in imagination the far reaches of your life voyage, the idea is to do what is at hand. If J. A. D. McCurdy, native son of Baddeck, N.S., had sat down to work out the details of a world air transport service, he would not have had time to fly the *Silver Dart* off Bras d'Or Lake ice on February 23, 1909 — the first flight in the British Empire.

One needs judgment, too. There are four steps in thinking through to good judgment: collecting the facts through observation and experience; considering and appraising them; explaining them by an hypothesis or "informed guess"; and confirming this hypothesis by test. This method leaves no room for taking things for granted or for jumping to conclusions on the basis of hearsay.

A sense of responsibility is a needed quality. Independence is a pleasant prospect, but it entails the acceptance of self-direction. One cannot be independent while leaning on others for support.

This involves discipline. There is a common inclination to shrug off advice to develop self-control. Life is complex enough, say some, without adding the burden of self-examination and self-criticism. This is an irrational objection. The purpose of self-control is to simplify and enlarge life so that one is not governed by standards and rules set up by others but by ideals formulated by oneself.

Enterprise is part of your mental equipment. An enterpriser (in business language, an *entrepreneur*) is one who seeks to make progress at the risk of a setback. He is a person of ideas and creative imagination, qualified for his work by knowledge he has gained and stored, but not afraid to try new ways.

The secret of value

The secret of a person's value to the world is his desire to be productive. The enterprising person works. To him, idleness is a ludicrous doctrine, unbecoming to men. You cannot learn to drive a car, play a guitar, or programme a computer, merely by watching others do these things. You must work at it, and improve your performance steadily.

This applies to every job, however humble it may be in the roster of occupations. Five garbage collectors in England were awarded fellowships in the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust foreign study scheme. They went to the continent and to the United States to study garbage collection and disposal.

Respect time. This is 1973: where do you plan to be in your work-life in 1978? That is the inescapable question every aspiring youth needs to answer.

It is not a four-week vacation on which you are

embarking, but your lifetime of activity. The years ahead should be filled with interesting and rewarding experiences. To make sure of this happy outcome you need to make a survey and answer some questions that will come to mind. Here are samples: What interests have I that I can pursue alone? What interests have I that involve me in work or pleasure with other people? Are my interests mind-filling as well as time-filling?

Looking ahead helps to ease impatience. When you plant a sapling three feet tall, nothing seems to happen to it the first year, or perhaps the second, but during all this time the tree is working hard to establish its roots. When it has pushed them into the earth and snuggled them close to their sources of nourishment, then the branches lengthen and the leaves multiply and the fruit appears. The higher a tree climbs, the more weight it has to carry, and the deeper its roots must burrow into the ground.

Room to grow

Young people stepping out of educational institutions have this to ask of those who preceded them: please move over and make room for us.

They may declare their ambition and their contract with life in this way: We intend to strengthen loyalty to the principles and institutions that provide the foundation and framework of the code by which we live. We of this generation are to become in the next twenty years the political representatives, the religious leaders, the judges, the scientists, the educators, the makers of art and letters and the protectors of the civil rights of the people.

In those twenty years we shall set social standards, heal the sick, care for the disabled, preserve natural resources, and promote civic welfare. It will be in our generation that the people of the world shall decide whether nuclear power shall spell out abundance or desolation.

There are certain conditions to be met in this great endeavour. If you are to dispel the ignorance and prejudice you deplore, and shine the light of knowledge and the grace of tolerance into dark places, you must do so within the law and without infringing human liberty. If you are to be a minister of the truth that makes men free you must be an unrelenting foe of acts and words that by purpose or in effect seek to restrict men's civil liberties.

Everyone is part of the drama, an actor willy-nilly on the stage of life.

It is not desirable to lament too fervently what is wrong in the play: if the script and acting had reached perfection there would be nothing for you to do. You can set yourself to produce a play that is the best possible one having regard to environmental factors which are beyond your control.

Patience and tact are needed, plus a determined but open mind. Your efforts should have the good qualities of steam: powerful, under control, and properly directed.