

Dr. Kurt Hahn at the
Forty-Eighth Annual Dinner
of
Old Centralians

The President, Sir Harold Bishop, C.B.E., F.C.G.I., B.SC.,
M.I.MECH.E., M.I.E.E., in the Chair

Sir Harold, Gentlemen,

I felt honoured when the invitation reached me to come here tonight to propose the toast of your Association and the College it serves. But I came here with considerable hesitation—in fear of humiliating memories which were bound to be revived in your distinguished company, the company of engineers and industrialists. Sure enough the memories are coming back.

When I was a boy of fifteen, my father took me to my grandfather together with my two brothers, and said to him, “What shall I do with my three sons when they are grown up?” and my grandfather answered, “If they are tolerably intelligent, send them to university—if they are very intelligent let them go into business.” My father turned to me: “You go to the University.”

The second memory is even worse.

I am technically, scientifically and mathematically sub-normal. I had a wonderful mathematical tutor and he tried his best and he was a wise and mild man. At the beginning of every lesson he said to me, “You are quite normally gifted”—at the end of every lesson he said, “I can make it clear to a horse with a small head, but not to you.”

Failure of Educational Systems

Now you will ask me how I have overcome my hesitation. This is the explanation. Like many educators I feel great anxiety about the state of the young throughout the free world: we are looking round for help—it is natural for us to turn to the great professional brotherhoods, hoping that they will share our concern and may even support us in our campaign—a campaign which is directed against the established system of education.

The record of your College impresses me with its spirit of public service and I particularly admire the story of amalgamation—it bears out a wise remark of George

Trevelyan: “This country has often been saved not by the wisdom of our statesmen but by the committee sense of our people.” I am also encouraged by the covering page of *The Central*—you are identifying your aspirations with those of the great City Companies, with their dedication to the common cause of humanity.

I will now justify my anxiety and my plea that the state of the young is grave enough to call for action.

Notting Hill has come as a great shock—we cannot treat it as an isolated incident. We must judge what has happened against the background of the statements issued by the Prison Commission. I am referring to the published statistics on the rise of juvenile crime. For one age group the crime rate has in one year risen by 56 per cent.

For this state of affairs people blame the lack of parental control and leniency of the Law—the established educational system of the country is hardly ever held responsible. But some of us educators feel that we ought to say, *nostra culpa, nostra maxima culpa*, ours is the guilt, ours the greatest guilt. Remedies have been advocated from many

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quarters—an Institute of Criminology is to be built up, the Ford Foundation has given large sums to London University for the investigation of crime—that is all to the good but action should not be delayed until scientific findings are available.

I remember a word of warning, which Sir Richard Livingstone uttered at a time when I was advocating the setting-up of many Outward Bound schools. He said, “We must always remember that in a democracy, and particularly in this democracy, it takes 30 years before a truth is translated into a reality.”

I was at that time already 60. So I found it a depressing thought that I had to wait till I was ninety. Some of us, educators and doctors, are in agreement about one of the main causes behind juvenile crime and believe there is sufficient evidence to start remedial operations right away.

Human Nature and Poets

I always have the feeling that there are no better guides to the understanding of human nature (which—as a friend of mine used to say—is very prevalent) than the great poets with their power of divining the secret springs of actions.

I am thinking of two poems by Tennyson. One is, “The Sailor Boy”: A boy wants to go to sea; father, mother and his sisters cling to him and warn him of all the terrible things that he will have to face. His answer is:

*“God help me! save I take my part
Of danger on the roaring sea.
A devil rises in my heart
Far worse than any death to me.”*

In another poem, “Rizpah” he tells us the story of a mother who has said “goodbye” to her boy about to be hanged for the robbery of the mail.

Stanza VI

*I kiss'd my boy in the prison before he went out to die.
“They dared me to do it,” he said, and he never has told me a lie,
I whipt him for robbing an orchard once when he was but a child--
“The farmer dared me to do it,” he said; he was always so wild--
And idle—and couldn't be idle—my Willy—he never could rest.
The King should have made him a soldier; he would have been one of his best.*

Stanza VII

*But he lived with a lot of wild mates, and they
never would let him be good;
They swore that he dare not rob the mail, and
he swore that he would;
And he took no life, but he took one purse, and
when all was done
He flung it among his fellows—“I'll none
of it,” said my son.*

This poem could have the title of, “The Tragedy of a Teddy Boy.” After the Notting Hill trial there were published in the papers the photos of nine youngsters who were sent to prison for four years—quite deservedly, to judge from the wonderful speech made by the judge. But I looked at these faces and they were just like faces of thousands of boys I have had to deal with. One could see there the power for great evil and also the power for great good and I say ours is the responsibility these boys went the wrong way.

Outward Bound Schools

I believe that education has failed to satisfy the thirst for action, the thirst for mastery which is the birthright of every healthy boy. Now, how can it be satisfied? Lord Mancroft said in the House of Lords the other day, speaking for the Home Office, that the rise in juvenile crime gives cause for grave anxiety and then he mentioned that the Prison Commission had made encouraging experiences with Borstal boys—not labeled as such—who were sent to Outward Bound schools.

Now what can happen in these Outward Bound courses which last only four weeks? I am always asked this question. My answer is this: I know of a very gallant general who was a very loyal subject of his King, and he walked back from a great battle which he had won,

and he met three ugly women with beards and then he came home and was welcomed by his ambitious wife. They talked for ten minutes—the whole thing lasts 35 minutes—and this loyal and trusted gentleman became the mass-murderer Macbeth! That can happen in 35 minutes! And so, through certain cleansing experiences, there can happen many things in a boy's life which may change his outlook and may change his conduct. In all Outward Bound schools there plays a part (the most important part), active service for the saving of lives and it has been proved that it is not war which “shows the human soul at its highest dynamics,”—the passion of rescue releases even higher dynamics. We have experienced it in Gordonstoun on a number of occasions that he who drills and labours and encounters dangers and hardships all to be ready to save his brother in peril, experiences God's purpose in his inner life. He flares up in anger when he encounters the doctrine or the practice which despises human life and human dignity.

Our young are today surrounded by five decays—the decay of fitness due to our modern methods of locomotion, the decay of self discipline helped by stimulants and tranquilisers, the decay of enterprise due to the widespread disease of *spectatoritis*, the decay of skill and care helped by the decline in craftsmanship and above all the decay of compassion which William Temple called spiritual death.

The Lawless and the Listless

The lawless are not the greatest danger to Society. We should feel an even deeper concern about the listless. To quote Trevelyan again, “Without the instinct for adventure in young men any civilization, however enlightened, any state however well ordered, must wilt and wither.”

I know of many young people who have wilted and withered. They are law abiding not on the strength of their virtue but because they lack the “guts of enterprise.” What disqualifies them from becoming enterprising criminals also cripples them for active citizenship. I accuse our schools: They have made many a spirited youngster purchase knowledge at “the price of power,” till the “stir has gone out of them.” I accuse our schools or rather the system which is imposed on them. They have not accepted the responsibility to develop antidotes against a diseased civilization.

Five Decays

Our young are today surrounded by five decays—the decay of fitness due to our modern methods of locomotion, the decay of self discipline helped by stimulants and tranquilisers, the decay of enterprise due to the widespread disease of *spectatoritis*, the decay of skill and care helped by the decline in craftsmanship and above all the decay of compassion which William Temple called spiritual death. I will illustrate some of these decays. The other day an American patient came to a friend of mine—a great surgeon—and complained about pains in his knee. The surgeon said, “When did you first feel your pain in the knee—when you went for a walk?” “I never go for a walk!” “When you went shopping, walking along the pavement?” “I always take my car.” “When you walk up stairs?” “I always take the lift.”

There has recently been conducted an enquiry into the fitness of American adolescents. Four thousand healthy teenagers were subjected to certain elementary tests demanding a minimum of fitness and over 50% of these 4,000 were proved unfit. These results shocked Eisenhower. No wonder, in view of the well-developed vitality of Russian youth. It's not as bad yet on the Continent of Europe or in England but there is a tendency that way. I will now come to the decay of self-discipline. You will not believe it, but I knew a very nice mother who gave her boy before he went to school a pill against homesickness! I tell you of an even more astonishing case—I once had a discussion with a prominent progressive educator in this country and he asked me this question—he believed that the young should enjoy everything, always, all the time. He didn't believe with Plato that there are good and sweet things and there are good and irksome things—and so he said to me very sternly, "You have the morning break every morning, do your boys enjoy jumping, running and throwing?" and I was rather naughty and said, "Do you enjoy brushing your teeth Sir?" and he said, "I don't enjoy it and I don't do it!"

The Remedies

Now what are the remedies we advocate? In talking to you about these remedies which we recommend, I must guard against the misunderstanding that we invented them. I can best of all illustrate this by giving you the gist of a conversation which Prince Max of Baden, the founder of Salem School, had with a rather over-enthusiastic American, who asked, "What are you proudest of in your beautiful schools?" Prince Max answered, "I am proudest of the fact that there is nothing original in them. We have cribbed from everywhere, from the Boy Scouts and from Plato and from the Public Schools, the German Youth Movement after the War of 1813." "But oughtn't you to aim at being original?" asked the American. "Not at all, it is in education as in medicine, you should harvest the wisdom of a thousand years. If you ever go to a surgeon and he wants to take out your appendix in the most original manner possible I would strongly advise you to go to another surgeon."

The Morning Break

Now our remedies. There is first of all the morning break in which every boy is taught to jump, to run and to throw—training proceeds at a leisurely pace. Every boy is encouraged not only to develop his strength but also to overcome his weakness and that is even more important than developing his strength. And every normal boy, also the sensitive and the vulnerable and the clumsy ones, can be brought to performances in athletics good enough to draw self respect there from, provided the sedentary habits of the morning are interrupted by this health-giving break.

Expeditions

And then we have the expeditions. It has become fashionable to speak of the dangers of television. I would like to say a word in defence of it, and I would say it even if I did not sit near Sir Harold Bishop. You cannot blame a violin maker if somebody plays a bad

tune on an instrument which he has produced, and which is a good instrument. In the same way you cannot blame television and its inventors for the misuse which is made of them. My point is this: television can stimulate you to go into active leisure provided you have a taste for active leisure. This taste can be acquired by all. I know few boys who do not draw strength, and retrospectively also joy, from an arduous expedition carried out to a definite goal. I remember once asking a boy who had sailed in our schooner around the Shetlands and Orkneys and encountered three gales, "How did you enjoy it?" He said, "Magnificently, except at the time."

Skills and Crafts

Now for the importance of training boys in skill and care. I believe every boy should learn a craft—should learn how to use his hands. It is particularly necessary for the sensitive bookworms, to have this antidote developed against an occupation which, in excess, can become poisonous. And there is often a great horror, which we should not respect, of skill and care. I remember once criticizing a piece of work which a boy had done—a very shoddy piece of work—and he said to me, "It is the genius of the English race to muddle through," and in his innermost heart he believed he contributed to the genius of the race.

Samaritan Service

Now we come to the worst social disease and its antidote. That is callousness which William Temple called spiritual death. I believe that through active Samaritan service you can satisfy the thirst for action in an honourable way and at the same time link it to the Christian purpose of life. We have heartening precedents in this country. In the war the messenger boys of the Fire Service have given a magnificent account of themselves. The Home Office treasures the record of the rescue work these boys did during the bombing of Plymouth. I shall never forget how at Gordonstoun our boys during stormy nights stood on watch at their coast guard station, in vigilant readiness "lest a vessel in distress burns an inefficient flare." These active services enthrall every normal boy. It is our great wish that the rescue services of the country—the Fire Service, the Coastguards, life saving on beaches and certain branches of the Police should be thrown open to the teenagers and be prepared to use them in "danger and in need." There are three ways of trying to capture the young; one is to preach at them—I'm afraid that is a hook without a work; the second is to coerce them like the Fascists and the Communists do and to tell them "You *must* volunteer"; that is of the devil; the third is an appeal which never fails, "You are needed."

Academic Demands

Now you will ask me, how are all these activities compatible with the academic work which we must demand from our boys, also in the name of realism. The answer is this—The difficulties are great. But I see hopeful signs that these may one day be overcome. The universities at the present moment demand a degree of specialization which is not only incompatible with a good all round education, but is also not in the interest of the specialists. Modern language specialists learn very little about the history of the countries

whose languages they are expected to master. The amount of history which the science specialists are allowed to be taught is microscopic when we think of the lessons a good citizen should learn from the achievements and failures of the past. Classical scholars often remain strangers to the exciting discoveries of this scientific age. But there is a growing unrest in the academic world above the effect of the present examination system on the plan of studies which secondary schools naturally feel obliged to enforce. The establishment of the Trevelyan Scholarships is to be welcomed. Outstanding scientists and humanists had gone into combined operations with the United Steel Companies and others to found 16 scholarships both in Oxford and Cambridge. They demand a high standard of intellectual development, a good general education but in addition, a “project” of research or exploration to be carried to a well defined end with tenacity and patience; such evidence to weigh more heavily than the “Advanced Levels.” Maybe this is the thin end of the wedge.

Youth Awards

We can register other healthy developments: Outward Bound seems to feel the duty of multiplication—may they not hesitate to encourage schools to adopt and modify the original pattern in running short courses of their own. The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme has opened a hopeful avenue. On the Continent there is growing support for the plan to establish a Nansen Badge for the whole free world in memory of the patriot, the scholar, the explorer who late in life sacrificed all his beloved interests to help suffering humanity. This badge would be designed to encourage pursuits of skill and care, of exacting enterprise and of Samaritan service. I hope that the designers will study the carefully constructed system of awards and incentives which has been built up by the City and Guilds of London Institute. Is it too much to hope that one day the City and Guilds College will cooperate in setting up machinery for judging purposeful leisure activities?

I sum up like this: I do not claim that health giving activities of the kind I have outlined can bring about the cure, but they have demonstrated that the ills of modern youth are curable.

I would not like to close without pointing to a remarkable spiritual awakening which has taken place among young people of the free world.

The Challenge to Western Youth

Will it be the prelude to the recovery of what Sir Winston Churchill once called, “Moral Health?” A great challenge has been thrown out in 1956 and our young have been deeply stirred, experiencing for the first time since the war the sacredness of the obligations which the Western Nations have undertaken. I am referring to the Hungarian revolt. It was drowned in blood but it was spiritually Victorious. In October 1956 one of the most wonderful sounds was heard—the “sound of fetters breaking”—we shall hear it again—“La bataille est parti” as Foch used to say. I am not referring to the military battle—while we should never tire of emphasizing in public the defensive character of our

alliance: in the psychological war, we should be the attackers, and our young have it in them to become the vanguard of our spiritual offensive. Since October 1956, the masters of the enslaved world know that they have lost the fight for the soul of the young but the West has not yet won it. There lurks in waiting a third force, a disintegrating force, cynicism, which since the war has afflicted the youth of the victorious western nations. Russia fears the verdict of youth as the guilty fear the Day of Judgment. Christianity is the weed in the garden of the devil. He tries in vain to exterminate it. Will it spread irresistibly? That is the fateful issue for the human race. Today, a cheated youth in the satellite countries and in Russia looks towards the West full of hope and full of distrust, asking a question that makes us blush, "Are you in earnest about the ideals you profess?" Who shall give the answer? I say, young men and women prepared to render hard and willing service, ready to do as the Good Samaritan has done. Under the veneer of skepticism and cynicism the youth of the free world has a great longing for a common cause to cry out. What is this common cause? I should like to define it in Trevelyan's words, "There are two passions not likely to die out in this world, the love of country and the love of freedom, but they can be kept pure by one thing which can tame yet not weaken them—the tenderest love for your fellow man." This is the cause which I believe you are serving and the great College of City and Guilds whose tradition is in your keeping.

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