

**ALMA MATER**  
**OR**  
**THE FUTURE OF OXFORD AND**  
**CAMBRIDGE**

# TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

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of the Book*

ALMA MATER  
OR  
THE FUTURE OF OXFORD AND  
CAMBRIDGE

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LONDON :  
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & Co., LTD.  
NEW YORK : E. P. DUTTON & Co.  
1928

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
STEPHEN AUSTIN AND SONS, LTD., HERTFORD

To  
H. G.

# ALMA MATER

OR

## THE FUTURE OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

IN a Sunday paper of last December I read an attack on Mr Wells. Its author was a noble lord who is still an undergraduate of Oxford; and he wrote on behalf of "the generation which is young to-day". I composed a reply to it. But the editor regretted. . . His public wished to hear no more opinions of Mr Wells.

*Alma Mater* is to some extent a re-statement of that unheard reply. It is a book about youth; it is a study of "the generation which is young to-day". Thus it deals both with to-day and to-morrow, for that generation will not always be young. It will soon be at the head of affairs; and I hope to explain what will be its attitude on getting there. But I cannot do this without first

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explaining its attitude to the stage which it has reached.

Thus I shall examine the types of mentality which are most common among youth. And the book is concerned with the Universities, because they lend themselves to the study of youth in the mass. You will say that the book should deal not with the youth of to-day, but with the universities of to-morrow. You will be eager for the next century, and indignant at being fobbed off with a mere 1928. You will look for a prophecy of strange subjects to be included in Schools, and of new encroachments on our freedom by the ladies. In your heart of hearts you expected that the "future of the universities" would turn out to mean the "future of the women's colleges". But I cannot think of the future except as it is likely to be conditioned by the present. For me, a study of the future must be an extension of a study of the present—a series of deductions from what we can observe to-day.

The university of to-morrow will be conditioned by the nature of to-morrow's social organism, and we cannot consider

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it apart from the general ideas which may shape our polity. For the university will not exist in isolation : it will be the sort of university which the society of to-morrow will require. And how will the society of to-morrow be organized ; on what lines will it wish to educate its young ? To answer such questions we must study the tendencies of to-day, which means that we must study the youth of to-day.

And where will you study youth if not in the universities ? Nowhere else will you find so large a gathering of young men and young women ; nowhere else is youth so free to manage its own affairs ; nowhere else can you realize so quickly the ideas which govern its practice.

*Alma Mater* is in no way an encroachment on the ground of *Procrustes*.<sup>1</sup> I have not attempted to write a rival treatise on the future of education. My concern is with the seats of education which Mr Pink expressly omitted from his survey ; and they are the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. But it is

<sup>1</sup> *Procrustes, or the Future of Education* ; by J. Alderton Pink (To-day and To-morrow Series.)



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not because they were refused a bed by *Procrustes* that my remarks are fully applicable only to these two. Oxford and Cambridge are the oldest English institutions of their kind. Their educational traditions have a longer history than have those of other universities. We have heard more of the atmosphere which reigns within them, and of the benefits which they bestow ; and the ways in which they have been modified by the present generation are thus more obvious than is the case with our modern universities. Unlike the university of London, those of Oxford and Cambridge are not part of a huge city. They are little worlds on their own, and we have no need to dissociate them from their surroundings before we can examine them. We know something of former periods in the history of Oxford and Cambridge ; it should thus be easier to see their present condition in its historical perspective ; and by seeing this condition in perspective we shall more surely grasp its meaning.

Our first concern is with the types of outlook which are most common in Oxford and Cambridge. I wish to show

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you how these outlooks will affect the activities of those who have been undergraduates in the professions which they later adopt. As they have made the universities, so they will later make the world of affairs. I wish to show you how they will envisage the problems of the future ; I wish to study their connection with any schemes for an *Open Conspiracy* ; and for this further reason I dedicate my book to Mr Wells.

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In *Alma Mater* you will find no picture of Oxford and Cambridge as I knew them. It is not my business "in one piece to expose whole *belles assemblées* of *coquettes* and *beaux*"—or even the *assemblée* of those of whom the last two adjectives might both be used. Nobody need turn up his diary, and prove he was not in Oxford on the day when I attribute this speech or that action to him. Nobody will discover characters on one of whom he will recognize the shape of his nose, and in another his taste in pyjamas. There will be a holiday for the Oxford dean whose inclusion will carry a first novel through its two editions.

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Nor shall I leap forward to the university of two centuries from now. The cinema has too big an advantage over the pen in this matter, and we shall not have to wait long for an educational Metropolis. At this moment a film company may be building the University of the Future on some American or German plain ; in a year or two it will have reached the Super ; and with luck it may have escaped the attentions of Mr Wells.

Thus *Alma Mater* does not present you with a future university as an accomplished fact. We shall study the generation which supplies Oxford and Cambridge with their undergraduates of to-day and England with her leaders of to-morrow. We shall see how they will affect the course of our civilization. I will show how they may change the features of civilization as we know it ; and among these features will be the University.

Each generation is born into a world whose institutions have mostly been founded long ago. Each generation gives a new significance to these institutions.

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It sees by the light of its own particular consciousness ; and thus it sees the old institutions in a light different from any in which they have been seen before. To each generation they look different, and each puts them to a use which is new because dictated by its own needs. The manner of the putting may perhaps not vary from that of former times, but the spiritual need to which they minister is never constant ; and the manner of the putting has thus no constant significance. It is possible that the form of the institutions and the procedure connected with them may long remain unchanged. But this does not mean that they serve the same purpose for each generation. It means that the form is vague enough, and the procedure loose enough, to admit of interpretations which are ever changing. It is when the limit of their adaptability has been reached that institutions die a death either violent or natural ; and an age has then to form something new.

I can imagine no institutions more adaptable to changing needs than are the universities. For what is the basic fact of a university ? Merely that it

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should be a settlement in which young men and young women are assembled for the purposes of mutual association and study. Each period has its most popular forms of mutual association ; each has its most respected branches of study. As an organism the university is as loosely knit as we could expect to find ; it is a bottle into which new wine can be poured with the minimum of disaffection to both. And to know what it has made of Oxford and Cambridge is the best means of understanding modern youth. For there, if anywhere, it has a free hand and little opposition ; there if anywhere we can watch it in action ; there if anywhere it has brought forth fruit by which we can judge it.

Each generation of undergraduates creates the university afresh. The lectures which dons recommend you may study the same problems as have always fascinated the lecturers. Men's games may be those which contribute to the anecdotage of their fathers ; their clubs may contain photographs of members whose attire makes it obvious that the club knew the 'eighties. But lectures and games and clubs are merely some of

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the materials of university life. As such they are offered to each generation, and each, if it accepts them, makes use of them in a different spirit. Each sizes up these materials in accordance with its own standards, and assigns new places to them in its own scheme of things. Thus each fashions a new Oxford as it goes along.

This process of fashioning is of course continuous. The creative work of one generation can never be disentangled from that of its predecessor and of its successor. You cannot mark off the line of evolution into lengths which correspond each to a period of three or four years. For what is created is no absolute system, doomed to be quickly replaced by another as absolute. What men create is the institutional framework of their lives. They make it correspond to their own sense of fitness ; and they create by means of modifications of what already exists. An institution which appears to be new is new in no absolute sense. It is produced by a reaction from something older, which is either decayed or is being exploited in a vested interest.

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It is this continuous modification as dictated by a changing consciousness which we know as the development of communities. But it can never be easy to grasp, because of the conflict which will always arise between the men of one epoch as to the means of effecting the required modifications and as to the merits of the counter-institutions which some may devise. It is only in the universities that people of like age can obtain a practical monopoly of the stage. And in them, as we have noticed, the process of modification is far simpler than elsewhere. Outside the universities the contemporary observer can see nothing but confusion. The generations follow closely at each other's heels; each one galls the kibe of another. The result is like an army of scene-designers who are fighting among each other to arrange the entire stage. Young Tom is trying to push this over; young Jimmy has already got something to put in its place; old Herbert is holding it in position with one hand, and trying to break young Jimmy's something with the other.

Within the same half-century the careers of men and women of all ages

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overlap ; within it all ages are obliged to work out their own salvation. And it is inevitable that they should quarrel about the institutions among which, and the principles by which, they shall live. It is also inevitable that these very institutions and principles should mean something quite different to each. And the behaviour which is dictated by the mental attitude of one generation will often seem lunatic to another. But they are fated to exist in mutual propinquity ; they can no more escape from each other than can a pair of Strindbergian lovers ; a Dance of Death is the condition of their existence.

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Our concern, however, is with the less strenuous dance of my contemporaries at Oxford and Cambridge. And let nobody imagine that it is impossible at their age to dance anything but the intricate country romps so dear to the ladies who teach private schools on Saturdays. Even towards the end of its stay at a public school, a generation is formed in mind sufficiently to modify the procedure of school life in accordance



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with its own sense of fitness. And the freedom of university life allows its mind to develop a new sureness. On what lines does the thought of my generation proceed? What atmosphere has it spread over Oxford and Cambridge? What does it expect of the world? What does it prize? By what standards does it judge? And what effect will its tendencies produce upon the framework of our society?

From such a study it is useless to expect precision of result. We can hope to deal only with the broad types of post-War mentality, and the intermediaries we cannot for their own sakes consider.

First, then, is the type of mind which is constructively religious, in that it preaches new ideals for mankind. Mr Wells has summed up these ideals as the articles of an Open Conspiracy. Its adherents are pledged to the formation of a new world-commonwealth, and they hope to found it upon the basis of an economic unity. They may not all have a programme as comprehensive as the Wellsian; some may have got no further than a scheme for the industrial reorganization of a particular country;

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a few may even think in terms of current politics. But each has his vision of human society and of human progress as a whole. Each believes we can scientifically organize our whole community; and some go further, and hope for the scientific development of our species.

The young thinkers whose minds move along these lines will in future be alluded to as conspirators. There may be almost as many conspiracies as there are conspirators to formulate them. But each conspiracy is inspired with a hope for the future; each will take thought for the whole of our race.

The party of the conspirators, especially of those whose interests are directly scientific, is reputed to be strong in Cambridge. But the conspiracies of my generation cannot yet be based upon much direct observation; it is inevitable that they should be largely derivative. But the conspirator's mode of thought is a new one. He thinks not of party programmes, and of remedial legislation, but of a new form of world-organization. He wants the directorate of groups; he wants the generalization of all concrete

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ownerships ; and this is a mode of thought which youth will impose upon the future. The university of to-morrow will be as this mode requires.

But we have not yet reckoned with the mode which is most popular in to-day's Oxford and Cambridge. We have yet to deal with scepticism. An outlook which is new requires a new word to describe it. But I have not thought of one ; and I fear we must be content with the old label of scepticism. It is tempting to those whose age or whose temperament has given them a different outlook to think of this scepticism as essentially trivial and immature. But as long as they think so, they will make nothing of contemporary manners ; the behaviour of youth will seem a series of insults to their own feelings ; in self-defence they had better realize what causes it. Don't think of modern manners as a bungling attempt to copy those of any other age. They exist in their own right ; they have been adopted by no fluke, but through their accordance with a particular outlook ; they are the manners of the sceptic.

The sceptical mentality is less easy to

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examine than the conspirator's. The conspirator's mind is turned towards the future. He is explicit as to what he hopes and intends to do, and he is only too happy to explain his constructive ideas. And he will explain them and defend them because his ideas are not those of the majority. He is a preacher to the unconverted, and so has every reason for making his message heard. The more clearly he can express himself, the more likely is he to gain the ear of a busy world.

Not so the sceptic. It is he and his kind who compose the world of to-day ; it is he who sets the tone of its business ; the university of to-day is the university as he has made it. And the scepticism of the majority is what the conspirator must combat. It is the order of the day. Consequently it is not expressed in pamphlets, but acted upon in daily life. It is not repeated as a creed ; it is manifested in our works.

Thus the scepticism of youth is difficult to examine because it is hardly ever explicit. Why should the majority explain its principles ? why should it formulate those ideas which it takes for

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granted? There are many things by which we order our lives. There is the multiplication-table. There is the 24-hours day. Yet who will trouble to explain this order, or to justify its authority? The intellectual ideas by which we order our lives are also taken by the majority as a matter of course. The majority is not aware of having formed them; they seem to be part of the natural order of things; often we imagine that they were shared by previous ages. And if anyone should formulate these ideas, it is doubtful whether we should recognize them. Very probably we should disown them. A generation will look at a statement of its own beliefs as fussily and as disturbedly as we look at the proofs of our own photographs. I am about to formulate the scepticism of my contemporaries. I shall explain them to themselves and show them where they are going. And who ever will lie down under that sort of treatment?

But it is difficult to write of scepticism not only because it lacks conscious expression. As a manner of thought it is too novel to be seen in perspective; it has yet to run its course; we cannot

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regard it as a complete historical phenomenon. And not only has population grown, but the number of the politically effective has so much increased that the thought of to-day must admit of very wide acceptance. And this new capacity for acceptance means that the thought itself must be correspondingly vague. The materialistic advances of the last century and the Great War of our own have destroyed the hierarchical order of society. We find the order flattened outwards. Popular literature and the press spread ideas across its surface, and their ability to spread far and wide means that their quality is thin.

The scepticism of youth is not the perquisite of a class. It is bound up with the traditions and the activities of no one order. It is more clearly at work in Oxford and Cambridge only because their undergraduates are economically and practically freer beings than are clerks of the same age or the undergraduates of other universities. But the majority of clerks and the majority of undergraduates have the same point of view; the one may make it more

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obvious ; but it is common to both ;  
and it is sceptical.

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We can get a rough idea of scepticism by seeing how youth impresses its elders. What strike them as the most obvious qualities of the undergraduate ? This question was plainly answered by Sir Rennell Rodd in *The Evening News*.<sup>1</sup> " Juvenile anarchy " is what he sees in England to-day. And " I have not come across this display of juvenile anarchy in other European countries, where there appears rather to be a general consensus of all ages to intensify energy in repairing the disaster of war ". He had been perturbed by the insistence of a young lecturer in Chicago on " the prevailing pessimism of English youth ". " Some revolt against convention " Sir Rennell allows to be " even commendable ". " But it is only tolerable when sustained by a constructive and not by a purely negative outlook. " And a negative outlook is what he finds in youth. Negative and pessimistic—there is scepticism, there is the bent of the majority, as seen by an unfriendly eye.

<sup>1</sup> The London *Evening News*, 13th January, 1928.

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Listen to Sir Rennell on the causes of this pessimism.

“ In the period immediately succeeding the War those who had survived four years of horror and privation yielded to the influences of reaction and gave way, in some cases, to excessive indulgence in things from which they had been so long cut off. Distractions which had once been occasional tended to become a habit. The rising generation, with the imitativeness of youth, followed the prevailing trend and was involved in the general relaxation and slackness. At a critical moment in their lives the restraining influences which make for discipline were in abeyance.”

“ The elder brothers, who in other days had licked the younger brothers into shape, had nearly all been killed, and so had a large proportion of the fathers. One important side of education—that formation of character for which home teaching should be responsible—was in many cases neglected or left to the school-master or mistress, who, even if they were competent in this respect, could not deal with boys and girls in the mass. The waning of family influence and a



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diminished sense of parental obligation stimulated premature independence in the children. And parents who were themselves extracting as much entertainment as possible from life sought to retain the affection of their children by too much indulgence."

"A period of anarchy resulted which has produced in its extreme manifestations the damsel of epicene appearance who has abandoned the old conventions of modest reticence, and the precocious youth who claims at one and twenty as large a share of the good things of life as the man of forty who has put in 20 years of work to earn them . . ."

"Apart, however, from these particular manifestations, there was discernible in the country even before the war a tendency to take much too light-heartedly the rapid invasion of fields of world enterprise in which our good fortune had enabled us to secure an initial supremacy, and to believe that things would right themselves without greater strenuousness and effort on our part. In former times, however, our public schools—admirable in the training of character—did supply us with young men full of the spirit of adventure

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and ready to exchange a good time for the drudgery of business or public service with prospects of ultimate, if long deferred success."

"To-day youthful ambitions seem rather directed to avoiding expatriation, or monotonous occupation, and to securing agencies or obtaining commissions for exploiting the labour of others. Incommensurate results, that is, are anticipated for a minimum of effort. My lecturer in Chicago invited our sympathy for a victim of the evil times, a young contemporary, a musician of brilliant promise who had now resigned all ambition and was conducting an orchestra in a restaurant or night-club. He had presumably expected success to be awaiting him on the near horizon of his maturity . . ."

"The trouble would appear to lie not so much in the times as in the temperament which pretends to a mastery over an art or craft without the long apprenticeship . . ."

"Indeed, though it is beyond question that our countrymen, when they consecrate their undivided energies—whether to science, art, literature, or

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industrial enterprise—achieve results which other nations envy, we seem in danger through our excessive devotion to sport and amusement, of approaching the more serious business of life in an amateur spirit. It was to efficiency and thoroughness that our long commercial pre-eminence was due.”

“Have we no longer a Jowett to teach the duty of public service? Will no voice be raised, no authority exercised, to restore the spirit of discipline and the ideal of sacrifice in a generation which must make good or go under?”

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The trouble is, in a word, a refusal to take things seriously. It is this which is responsible for the amateur spirit, and it is this which men of Sir Rennell's age find typical of the university. Most of these undergraduates lack, as far as they can see, any guiding purpose; their conduct is inspired by no ideal; their forces are given to no objective service. The claims of sport itself seem to get but slight attention from the sportsmen. Odd things have a way of happening in our big athletic events.

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These young men are amateurs ; and, as amateurs, they end in doing nothing in particular, and not doing it very well.

Everyone is agreed in dating the full riot of this amateurishness from the War. Everyone agrees that the War marks a turning-point in the history of our manners. It made havoc among the generation of which Rupert Brooke was the standard-bearer, and of whose hopes Ben Keeling did not live to record the ruin. A great part of that generation disappeared—as Mr Malleon will tell you in almost any of his plays. But my contemporaries were too young to feel any direct emotion from the War. To me it recalls nothing more definite than a series of casualties, and reports of atrocities, and a lack of potatoes at school, and suddenly recanted prophecies of Russian triumphs, and an idea that the restoration of peace would mean the end of excitement. In other words, I was only eleven on that November morning in 1918 when they assembled us in the hall of my private school, and told us to give three of the heartiest cheers that had ever been heard. After which we assisted at a short service in chapel, and were

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then sent out to play football. And I realized nothing of what the War meant to the maturer minds of the day until I read Middleton Murry's *Evolution of an Intellectual*. But my generation could grasp none of the intellectual and social implications of the War. It learnt nothing at first hand from those four years. But during those four years a society was dissolving, and its dissolution was accomplished when my childhood closed.

Ruin was in the air which my generation breathed at school. The world was anxious to grasp the meaning of what had occurred. The old order had been broken, and its fragments have not been pieced into a new organism. There is no system into which youth could naturally be absorbed ; the conspirators are labouring to build a new framework ; the majority is content with scepticism.

The sceptic grew up to find a society in ruins. And in a ruined society he can attach absolute importance to no thing and to no action. The War exposed for him the essential vulgarity and instability of our big-city civilization. He sees that our recent discoveries have done nothing to enrich the personality, and

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act merely as devices to save it worry. They have indeed served only to connect and to nourish the big-city communities into which our civilization has been gathered. And during the War we vied with each other in the applying of them to the business of destruction. Our belief in materialism is shaken ; thus the old security and confidence has vanished, and it is natural that "efficiency and thoroughness" should go too. For these things depend upon a conviction that we know the worth of what we are doing, and that we can see where it will lead us ; and the sceptic is without such conviction.

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The conspirators have their own interpretation of our history, and they will not allow our Yahoo instincts to dictate its course. They will save us from the flounderings of our present, and a group of them will save us even by the sciences which served those instincts in the War. All conspirators hold that it is within man's power to become the master of his destiny. Some think he will become it with the help of applied science,

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some by the concerted action of conspiratist groups. But the sceptics have no use for the racial problems which appeal so strongly to the 19th century and to the conspiracy. They try no longer to find a meaning in human progress, or to help in its direction. And in the absence of an envisaged goal, they can think of no constructive social policy. They do not return the ticket of material comfort which they have been given. They make full use of it. But they do not care what it represents or where it may take them ; it is just a ticket ; and for the moment it is handy.

We must not hope to find even in Cambridge that many blows have yet been struck for the conspiracy. Undergraduates are conspirators in vision rather than in achievement. And even their visions are mostly prompted by external suggestions. But what sort of future is it which they imagine ? On what lines will the thought of a young conspirator run ?

He will have gained confidence from the speculations of *To-day and To-morrow*. This series has offered us many visions of the future. It has dealt some-

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times with the future of our race as a whole, sometimes with the future of institutions and enterprises which we know to-day. It has made us think of our institutions merely as expedients for the achievement of social ends. It has made us consider what, if any, are the social ends which we should set before us. Many of its writers have shown how by means of scientific discoveries man may regulate the working of his mind and of his passions. The doyen of *To-day and To-morrow* is Mr. J. B. S. Haldane.<sup>1</sup> And what for the layman is the kernel of his thought is the kernel of all biological conspiracy. It is a belief that man will consciously improve himself by means of external help ; it is a belief that the race will set, or allow the scientists to set, biological ideals before itself ; it is a belief that progress will come from experiment with our physique and our institutions. For science can adjust them to the producing of new conditions.

The young conspirator, whether or not he be a practising scientist, will regard

<sup>1</sup> Author of *Daedalus*, or *Science and the Future*, 1925, and of *Callinicus : a Defence of Chemical Warfare*, 1925.



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the human race as one whole. He does not think in terms of nationalities, or of the national groups which form a cultural unit. It would seem that he views the development of the species as one single process, and that he imagines a future for the species as one whole. The biologists among the conspirators see man primarily as an animal. They do not think of us as members of an articulated society. We are biological specimens, which differ from others in the greater control which we can exert over our present and our future.

The conspirator is thus anxious for the welfare of the race. For him the sections of the world are economically dependent upon each other, and he hopes for an organization which shall embrace them all. But the majority of us does not know what it means to think in terms of the race. It thinks of humanity in social and national compartments, and it is shocked by the idea that such things can be regulated scientifically. It takes even less kindly to the idea that our personal emotions can be exploited in the interests, as interpreted by the scientist, of all.

The conspirator who is not professionally a scientist shares the latter's refusal

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to give absolute value to the conventions of the moment. To be any sort of conspirator you must recognize "the provisional nature of existing governments" <sup>1</sup> and institutions. You must also have "the determination to replace private, local, or national ownership of at least credit, transport and staple production by a responsible world directorate serving the common ends of the race". You must own "the supreme duty of subordinating the personal life to the creation of a world directorate capable of these tasks and to the general advancement of human knowledge, capacity and power." <sup>2</sup> The Open Conspirator will admit with the biologist that "our immortality is conditional and lies in the race, and not in our individual selves" <sup>3</sup>.

But the non-biologist conspirator has no final sympathy with the aims of Daedalus. He thinks of Daedalus merely as a useful worker within future society. His ideal is a world-community which shall embrace and direct all personal

<sup>1</sup> *The Open Conspiracy*, by H. G. Wells, 1928, p. 113 (Victor Gollancz, Ltd.).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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activity, while the disciple of Daedalus is concerned less with a community newly organized than with the race as a biological unit. He, Daedalus, aims at the production, for its own sake, of an ever higher racial efficiency. He wishes not to make a framework for personal activity, but to use our personalities for the creation of new types. Framework of any kind is exactly what he would free us from. His future is one in which men are occupied in increasing their individual efficiency; he will make us ever more independent of social forms which may fix or regularize a stage in our progress as a race.

The Open Conspirator does not share the wish of Daedalus to make the individual self-sufficient. He hopes to give self-sufficiency to the community. Its members will be freed by the fall of national and capitalist barriers, and they will be freed for the service, through various channels, of all. He will save us through rational direction of our public activities, and not through the externally induced efficiency of our own selves. He will save us by the control of our economic enterprise, and not by the control of those combinations of

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chemical actions which we are pleased to call our natures. The Open Conspirator will get at our professions. The biologist will get at our natures.

They will both have long to wait before humanity will submit to such a discipline. And how is the wait to be shortened? It is necessary that the conspirators—the party which is ready for self-sacrifice—should dominate the sceptics, or itself become numerically superior. And the benefits from the new organization and the new experiments must become obvious before the weaker brethren have time to murmur. For the moment, Daedalism can hope merely to run a department of the established conspiracy. It may experiment on a small scale under the patronage of the Open Conspirator, and it may furnish *ad hoc* advisory boards to the group directorate. Whether it has a future of its own depends on the impression which its experiments make upon the Open Conspiracy as a whole.

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The universities of to-day provide no congenial soil for any conspiracy. Their very uncongeniality goes far to strengthen the

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new faith. For in Oxford and Cambridge we see what Mr Wells has called the "waste of youthful seriousness". Youth itself wastes its seriousness; it does so with its eyes open; it does so as a result of the influences among which it grew; it wastes its seriousness because it is sceptical.

"It will be a minor aspect of the world revolution to live down the contemporary theatre, contemporary 'amusements', the sentimental booms and imitative chatter, the ovine congregating to gape at this or that, the dull pursuit of sports and 'games' and quasi-innocent vices, the fashions and industrious futilities of current life so soon as it escapes from poverty. The whole drift of the contemporary world is to tempt and ensnare and waste our children. It has a diabolical disposition to make life altogether trivial and ineffective." <sup>1</sup>

The said children sensed this disposition as they grew up. They brought it to bear upon their schools and universities. And "trivial and ineffective" is just what a conspirator finds these things. For the disposition is scepticism.

<sup>1</sup> *The Open Conspiracy*, p. 141.

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“ Now what the contemporary senior tells his junior to-day is perfectly correct. In his youth, no serious impulse of his went to waste. He was not distracted by a thousand gay but petty temptations, and the local religious powers, whatever they happened to be, seemed to believe in themselves more and made a more comprehensive attack upon his conscience and imagination. Now the old faiths are damaged and discredited and the new and greater one, which is the Open Conspiracy, takes shape only slowly. A decade or so ago, socialism preached its confident hopes, and patriotism and imperial pride shared its attraction for the ever grave and passionate will of emergent youth. Now socialism and democracy are ‘ under revision ’ and the flags that once waved so bravely reek of poison gas, are stiff with blood and mud and shameful with exposed dishonesties. Youth is what youth has always been, eager for fine interpretations of life, capable of splendid resolves, but it comes up out of its childhood to-day into a world of ruthless exposures and cynical pretensions. The past ten years has seen the shy and power-

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ful idealism of youth at a loss and dismayed as perhaps it has never been before. It is in the world still, but masked, hiding even from itself in a whirl of small excitements and futile defiant depravities."<sup>1</sup>

Scepticism is the means by which youth justifies this hiding ; it is the explanation of all the excitements and depravities ; it is the method by which youth has reconciled itself with a ruined society ; it is the philosophy of wasted gravity and of wasted passion.

We shall see how it is applied in the universities, and we shall see what sort of life the majority has made for itself. In a word, we shall watch scepticism at work ; but we have first to think more carefully of what it implies.

The sceptic saw nothing of pre-War Europe, and he has no experience of a settled age. He has seen the world either at war, or in the throes of reconstruction. He has known the collapse of the old European framework ; he has watched the seeming arrest of all progress ; and his position is one of great humility. The sceptic has dismissed as

<sup>1</sup> *The Open Conspiracy*, p. 143.

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a superstition any belief that the nineteenth century for the first time equipped us for the battle of life. He has lost all respect for the dignity of man, or for the quality of his material achievement. He thinks of man's development as forced upon him by the action of fortuitous circumstance. You cannot predict how he will behave, or what will come of his behaviour. Who knows what new person may not modify our aims in accordance with his or her influence?; who knows what accident may not have warped our minds or obscured our vision?; how can we give a general significance to the particular turns of our interrelated fortunes?

The sceptic is content to think of them as having no general significance, and it is this refusal to generalize them or to give them objective meaning which is the peculiarity of his scepticism. He arranges them according to no principle, and so he is without a principle of his own in dealing with them. In a life which he has emptied of values he can respect nothing, and can take nothing seriously. He has no belief in the discredited institutions, and no wish to devise new ones of his own.



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The old order of society has been broken. Even his elders doubt the old arks of safety. And since he feels that we can invent no institutions which are just, he is content with the ruins of the old. For he can fit them into his scheme, and his scheme calls for nothing new.

The pre-War order was said to embody a higher stage of progress than we had formerly reached. We proceeded to wreck it; and an order of wreckage strikes the sceptic as just what we deserve, and what suits us; why arrange a new order which in some burst of folly we should in turn overwhelm?

We have religious and political institutions in which older men can trust. And, although they envisage them quite differently, there are some of my contemporaries who still take them into account. But most of those who take thought for the community—the conspirators, in fact—have accepted a Wellsian interpretation of religion or else the gospel of Daedalus. The new cults of introspection and the new organizations of human unconsciousness and of human efficiency are all signs hopeful for the conspiracy. For all are

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cults of practical behaviour ; all define rules for the achievement of certain ends. And since they are concerned with the future, the conspiracy can embrace these cults and synthesize their ends. But the sceptical majority gives no thought to the future.

The sceptic sees our lives as shaped by circumstances ; all of them appear fortuitous ; thus he cannot regard them as significant, or attempt to get control of them. We are often told that youth does not take things seriously—we have listened to Sir Rennell Rodd on the subject. What is meant is that youth does not take certain things more seriously than others. And this is true. The sceptic thinks of no subject as innately serious ; he sees no hierarchy of values in human activity ; no subject, no institution, no principle has an intrinsic claim upon his respect ; no action has in its own right any importance or significance ; everything for him is on one plane of seriousness.

This does not mean that as a necessary result my contemporaries are made careless. Nobody has seen in them a dreamy incompetence such as an English actor

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will affect in Russian plays. I cannot agree with Mr Wells that they are hesitant or bewildered. They are saved from it by the scepticism which explains things for them ; scepticism is their own interpretation of life ; they want nobody else's ; theirs is quite good enough.

They understand their own point of view very clearly, and this clear headedness follows naturally from their scepticism. It is just because they think of their decisions as on matters of no essential importance that the sceptics will make them in so impartial a spirit. It is just because all conduct seems as incalculable in its result as it is fortuitous in occasion that their taking of action is often so abrupt. It is just because they find no subject more important than another that they will discuss them equally freely, and will never make their own affairs seem sacred or peculiar in their difficulty.

The sceptic has no sense of certain activities as having more claim on him than others. Nor has he a sense of certain primary questions as needing an answer. In a word, he does not feel obliged to solve those general problems of behaviour which were formerly thought to give

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restless days and worse nights to conscientious youth. Thought can hardly be an undergraduate occupation when you are already convinced that no explanation is possible. The older generation is inevitably struck by the lack of any missionary sense which the sceptic displays. These young men from Oxford and Cambridge feel born to set nothing right; the time may indeed be out of joint, but that is exactly the condition in which they would expect to find it; they have no vision of an ideal world, and so they can begin to remedy no single abuse in the light of that vision.

Can they begin to do anything? Certainly they can. Remember how they volunteered to break the General Strike; remember that good performances still occur in university sport; remember that Cambridge at least is still smiled upon by the Press. The devotion of their powers to a cause is not incompatible with their sense of proportion. But it is a devotion which will not destroy that sense. However many hours the sceptic may work, and however much income that work may bring him, will in no way affect the proportions in which he sees it. Interesting

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and profitable his work may be ; but it is always work ; it is always an occupation ; for its own sake it has no existence ; he is conscious that it is the fulfilment of nothing but his own energy.

The abuses and anomalies of our institutions and our social life worry the sceptic not at all. He has never believed these institutions or conventions to contain anything of absolute truth, and since nobody takes these things seriously, what harm can they do him ? They have not yet got in his way ; they admit of an interpretation which suits him. So why seek to replace them by something of which he might have expectations, and which in practice would certainly disappoint him ? Let us be content for as long as possible with a system in which nobody sees intrinsic values, and under which nobody can suffer disillusion. Older folk may find an absolute importance in rank, or in wealth, or in holy matrimony. The sceptic does not, but he finds them ready to hand. And since nobody is deceived by them, and nobody would be content with a new arrangement, he accepts them.

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The sceptic has given his own significance to the features of university life. Young men still speak in the Union, and row, and play football, and act Shakespeare. And a few years hence they will be writing for a paper, or nursing a constituency, or taking up a commission in the army. What is there new in all this? you will say; where does the scepticism come in? The newness lies in that the business of debating, or of soldiering, or of sport, has no objective significance for the men who practise it. The scepticism lies in that they will nevertheless continue in this practice to give of their best. It is this union of disbelief and of effort which is modern scepticism; and there is no dishonesty in the union. If the sceptic thought there was anything worth an effort for its own sake, he would not go on working as he does. But he has no such thought.

We have seen that there is no reason for young men and women to make their scepticism explicit. Except for the conspirators, their contemporaries share it, and would see no purpose in its discussion. And you cannot expect elders and

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employers to realise that efficiency in a profession is compatible with disbelief in its importance. Working men and women know better than to unpack their hearts with words. But Mr Beverley Nichols was once provoked into an expression of those views which are his own, and which he believes to be typical of the day.

“Therefore I would be bold and say that the key to my outlook and to that of so many of my contemporaries, is that I have seen through things and have been honest enough to admit it. It is an ungraceful, inelegant phrase, and one too which has about it the staleness of much youthful cynicism. But I try to express a quality as divergent from the rationalism of the eighteenth century as from the amaciated disillusion of the 90's. It is a perfectly cheerful emotion, a happy agnosticism, in no way unpoetical, the sort of emotion which enables one to love the moon without believing it to be peopled by fairies . . . You may say ‘if you, and the rest of your generation feel that the world is futile, you have no part in it. You will not fight its battles nor sing its songs. You only stand aside

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mocking or deploring, according to your temperament'."

"That argument is quite wrong. The fact that I do not believe in a cause does not prevent me from dying for it. (Do you think that all the young men who died in the War believed a quarter of the poisonous, but necessary, nonsense that was preached by the politicians?) Though the road leads nowhere, one marches on. What else is there to do? Besides, there are so many bright sights to be seen and brave sallies to be made en route."

"Futility, you see, can be great fun. Even at one's university one realised that. I remember in my first spring at Oxford, walking down the crocus-fringed paths of Magdalen with a friend, and discussing the regeneration of English politics. Nothing very new in that, you will say. I agree."

"What was new and what was significant in that walk was our open admission, in a sudden moment of frankness, that the whole thing was meaningless. We meant to do it because it would have been intensely amusing, but we could not believe that we should thereby greatly benefit mankind."



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"Did the young worshippers of Gladstone or Disraeli have such qualms? I doubt it. But make no mistake—half of the young followers of Mr Baldwin, or my Lord of Oxford, or of Mr Ramsay MacDonald, have not nearly such pleasant illusions about their public heroes as you may imagine."<sup>1</sup>

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I am able to quote no other personal statement of scepticism. But the state of mind is profusely illustrated in contemporary writings, and we shall soon look to them for instances of scepticism in action. But first let us glance at the undergraduate press. How does sceptical Oxford write a comment on its own doings? I quote an editorial by Mr Maurice Green, in *The Cherwell*.

"On looking through the back numbers of *The Cherwell*, we find that one subject has not been touched for nearly three years—and it is at least a triennial subject—the gentleman's education. I suppose that the first phenomenon of this remarkable system appears when one considers

<sup>1</sup> *Are They the Same at Home?* by Beverley Nichols, 1927 (Jonathan Cape, Ltd.).

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the extent of one's useful knowledge and then remembers that it has taken some fourteen years to collect. Fortunately it is a phenomenon which the taking of an Oxford Final School helps to explain; this particular piece of education not only can take—but according to most of my informants actually does take—about three months: more work than this is apt to exhaust the subject, although six months is a possibility. One is expected to spread this over three years. The public school education appears slightly better at first sight—it seems as if a two-year education has taken us a mere five; but then it occurs to the mind that after all in the average 'form' or 'class' ten minutes' worth of knowledge took an hour or possibly an hour and a half, so one can divide those two years by at least six. Preparatory school education can perhaps pass muster, simply because at that age one is not really capable of learning anything worth knowing."

"I suppose there are two reasons for it—one, that everybody is supposed to learn at about the same pace that school-masters did in their youth—and I can quite imagine that the average school-

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master needed either fifteen years' education or none at all—and the other, that because on a net three months' work people seem to know only about a reasonable amount, the authorities still consider that everyone needs two years and nine months to steel themselves to the effort. Good enough reasons, apparently ; but, not content with this, they persist in thrusting upon us a whole bevy of 'subjects' which could not possibly exist except for the inventive ingenuity of people specially commissioned to discover means of wasting other people's time. I trust sincerely, for example, that none of our readers really believe that there is such a subject as 'economics' ; it is a gross fiction born of the academic mind, conceived of the rarefied air of the Universities, and dead, buried, and forgotten by anyone who ever handled a larger sum than a bank-note. Philosophy is another fictitious idea, which the dons, although they have not invented it, have not been compelled to discard along with the power of hanging undergraduates from Magdalen Bridge and fining them five pounds for disagreeing with Aristotle. And 'English Literature'—

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They might as well undertake to teach people, love, or eyesight. But I suppose it employs some thirty pedagogues in Oxford alone ; and all these things have that effect which Disraeli attributed to academic learning : they ‘ fill old ladies with awe—principally at the idea of there being such depth in anything so completely useless ’. I had forgotten Latin ; how it trains the brain, and how it helps us to quote ‘ per ardua ad astra ’ as we watch ex-office boys rise to the highest power in the country.”

“ But do not think I am advising the permutation of Oxford into a technical school or an establishment of advanced secondary education ; far from it. I leave that to the Master of Balliol. On the contrary, I would rather carry the idea to its logical extreme or abolish it. Preferably, I should like to see the whole *soi-disant* ‘ education ’ transformed into complete idleness from the time one enters a public-school to the time one leaves the university. It is the natural conclusion, and it would also be honest. We should be ‘ brought together ’ as ‘ boys ’, and again as ‘ young men ’, and then left to educate ourselves. After

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all, it is this 'association with people of one's own age' and the resulting esprit de corps which, one is always told, are the great value of the English system. And no one would suffer. Public-school masters would be employed in keeping the boys together, superintending games, and taking house-prayers, while, since all fellowships are more or less completely endowed and no one would grudge their termly ten guineas merely because they were excused tutorials, the dons would reap even fuller benefits than ourselves; they could cultivate the beautiful the whole of their lives."

"As an alternative one could abolish the whole thing, and this would certainly have its advantages. Under the present circumstances, one can be idle either till nineteen or till twenty-two; with the new system, one could be idle up to an age chosen entirely at random. The only difficulty that suggests itself, is that parents would not enter into the spirit of the thing, once they were disillusioned. Perhaps the former solution would be the simpler; for, after all, neither public school nor university is actually forced upon one."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Cherwell*, 26th May, 1928.

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These sentiments would excite nobody if they came from one who had been to no public school or university, and who was bent upon a reform of the system. The point is that they come from one whose academic career has been distinguished, and who is willing to remain at Oxford for at least another year. His opinion of philosophy is no more likely to prevent his getting a first in Greats than his opinion of Mods kept him out of the first in that exam. A lack of illusion leads neither to a flagging of effort nor to a practical scheme of reconstruction.

And listen to the editor on the subject of his own paper. Does he think of it as a vital contribution to the life of the university? does he think of it as bearing a message to his contemporaries? yet does he not continue to perform the duties of an editor?

“For the benefit of those who are ignorant of the fact, Schools take place towards the end of this term. That means to say, that one-third of the University is miserable, in fact, and the other two-thirds miserable by association. It requires the Summer Term to prove

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unexpectedly that doing something is even more unpleasant than doing nothing. But for the consolation of those who take honest Fourths, we should like to remind our readers how the late Lord Leverhulme said that he preferred the man who had taken his degree in the school of hard knocks to the man who had taken his in the Oxford Tripos . . .”

“Now we wish to call attention to the bright new features embodied in our paper. As you observe, *The Cherwell*, as the leading newspaper of the University, has been appointed the official organ of the Froth Blowers. The membership amongst University men is not as strong as it should be, considering the valuable work of the association, and its popularity almost everywhere else, and we hope for a quick and generous response. Then we have Flamingo, who will tell you how to win money on horses, and will point out afterwards exactly why you lost it, completing each week by showing you your colossal profits on the system of laying a sovereign each way on every horse selected. Another gentleman will advise you on another page whether you should purchase a Mercedes, a 6-litre Bentley,

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or a 40-50 Rolls-Royce, and we can confidently recommend you to peruse his expert articles before making your choice. Finally, we hope to establish a commercial page, dealing with the possibilities of bribery and debt-shirking in America and other primitive communities."

"Attacks on our contemporaries will form scarcely any part of our programme, except when provoked either by insult or idiocy, and we shall devote the space saved in this way to blowing our own trumpet. Moreover, neither of the two jokes about the Baby Austin will appear in any form, and we recognize no difference of behaviour in the Englishman, the Scotchman, and the Irishman. But it will be difficult to leave Mr . . . alone." <sup>1</sup>

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It was easy for *The Cherwell* to make itself a significant commentary upon Oxford doings to which our fathers would have attached importance. For the paper is post-War in origin, and is thus burdened with no traditional policy which has ceased to be sympathetic.

<sup>1</sup> *The Cherwell*, 5th May, 1928.



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People do not waste a sixpence on *The Cherwell* if they are anxious to know the bare news of the week. They buy it in order to see how it will remove from their pedestal the personalities and the events which have attracted attention ; they buy it in order to watch the reduction of these personalities and these events to the same level as is occupied by those which none discuss ; they buy it in order to see them drawn to the sceptical scale.

For the chronicle of the time you must look to *The Isis*, and only in its editorial can this paper do much commenting on the Oxford of the day. Its tradition is apt to weigh a little heavily upon the editors, who write for a public that is not, as is *The Cherwell's*, confined to undergraduates. Thus *The Isis* or *The Granta* in Cambridge can give you no free scattering of sceptical comments ; the form of these papers will not permit of more than a few. The present editor of *The Isis*, however, has blunted no more than the edge of a style which once made it possible to read the *Eton College Chronicle*. The difficulty of such writing is that an *Isis* leader must often consider one particular abuse or one particular

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judgment upon university life. It is thus difficult not to imply that Oxford is seriously perturbed by the abuse or by the judgment. But an editor with the resource of Mr Fleming will propose to you that the abuse is objectionable because it monopolizes too much of the available energy, or that the judgment is absurd because it represents one aspect of Oxford as more important than another. His editorials will treat of anything which has got out of proportion, and this proportion will allow no more essential importance to one topic than to another. He will discuss a subject without raising it on to a pedestal ; he will praise or blame without suggesting a scale of values.

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We often think of the most active members of the Union or the O.U.D.S. as obsessed with the business of politics or of acting. There has been an obvious conspirator or two at the Union during the years when I was an irregular speaker ; I have known one or two members of the O.U.D.S. who had no patience with dramatic art which they found essentially rotten. But the missionary

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sense and the sense of responsibility dwell no longer within these societies; no longer do they represent an ideal to which service is due. The service which they get is a personal matter, and is recognized as such.

This is what you must expect of a sceptical community. If he had any sense of clubs or papers as realities on their own, a young man would not be a sceptic. The very University means nothing to him; for him it embodies no spirit of its own; it has nothing of its own to give him. The motor car and the telephone have robbed the university of a separate existence, and enabled the sceptic to take it in his stride. And he has made Oxford into a provincial town like any other. Just as he is blind to any values in activity, so is he blind to anything inherent in institutions. He is conscious of nothing except persons as having any existence. He knows no objective values, no church, no cause, no university, no society.

Don't think I claim to know the spirit in which clubs or papers were previously organized, for we can have no grasp of the mentality of an age other than our

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own. We can but try to piece it together by working on the forms of art, and speech, and dress, and manners, which it created, and which we can yet study. And even when pieced together we can never make that mentality our own. The mentality of an age is formulated in the whole social and intellectual framework of its day, but of this we can, in the case of a past age, have no more than glimpses. I am trying to sum up the sceptical mentality of our century by describing the social and intellectual framework of our lives ; clubs and newspapers are still part of the framework of university life ; and we can both observe the manner in which they work and induce therefrom the mentality which dictates that manner. But in the case of past mentalities our data is too scrappy.

We have already noticed that the sceptic has a clear sense of efficiency in performance. He appreciates this sense in others, and his appreciation of art springs from a recognition of this in the artist. Thus he will admire a Diaghelief ballet because he feels it to achieve the effect desired, and because, when it occurs, this achievement is more

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obvious than can ever be the case with an art in which speech is employed. This elimination of speech, and the shortness of the time necessary to complete it, make the form of the Ballet the art-form most agreeable to the modern spectator. Its lack of volition gives the Ballet a charm additional to that of its efficiency.

But do not imagine that all art is likely to get an unwonted attention from the sceptics. Art is as unpopular as ever, because to-day, as ever, the public is bored when you confront it with significant form. It can bear its novel, and its film, and its evening at the theatre, because hardly any novel, or film, or play has a form which we must put ourselves to the trouble of apprehending—has, in other words, anything of a work of art about it. The public can, therefore, take such a thing in its stride ; and it will do so quite readily ; it will do so all the more readily in that any belief in the importance of art as an alternative to what can be taken in its stride is being sapped by its own increasing scepticism. The public of to-day is pleased by the Ballet ; it is also pleased

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by the Musical Comedy and the Revue ; but it does not take this pleasure as a matter of importance.

The sceptic's relations with art are well illustrated by a passage in Mr Maugham's novel, *Ashenden*.

"It was at the time when Europe discovered Russia. Everyone was reading the Russian novelists, the Russian dancers captivated the civilized world, and the Russian composers set shivering the sensibilities of persons who were beginning to want a change from Wagner. Russian art seized upon Europe with the virulence of an epidemic of influenza. New phrases became the fashion, new colours, new emotions, and the highbrows described themselves without a moment's hesitation as members of the intellegentsia. It was a difficult word to spell but an easy one to say. Ashenden fell like the rest, changed the cushions of his sitting room, hung an eikon on the wall, read Chekoff, and went to the ballet."

Subsequently Ashenden and a Russian lady believe themselves to be in love with each other. She says her husband will free her by committing suicide.

"He was startled, but thrilled. It

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was really very much like a Russian novel, and he saw the moving and terrible pages, pages and pages in which Dostoievsky would have described the situation. He knew the lacerations his characters would have suffered, the broken bottles of champagne, the visits to the gypsies, the vodka, the swoonings, the catalepsy, and the long, long speeches everyone would have made.”<sup>1</sup>

It is in this manner that the sceptic will talk to you. It does not mean that he is in the least impatient with Russian art or with his appreciation of it. He is often to be seen at the Ballet ; he knows something of Chekoff and Dostoievsky ; and he has felt the fascination of them all. He is glad to have looked at life under the forms in which they showed it to him. But he will not pretend that the satisfaction which they gave him was a matter of great consequence ; he will not claim an essential benefit from the spending of evenings with them rather than from the spending of evenings in any other way. So little importance does he attach to his own reactions that, even while he

<sup>1</sup> *Ashenden, or The British Agent*, by W. S. Maugham, 1928.

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applauds the Russians, your sceptic will realise that other artists exist who would move him to an understanding wholly different from what the Russians may suggest.

The sceptic is never averse to receiving a new sensation, though he will never so far forget himself as to take it seriously. Art often gives him a new sensation, and while it lasts he will talk about it, and honour those who are responsible for it, and surround himself with their work. But that it moves him to-day is no reason why it should move him next month. Why this Russian should deal in broken bottles and long, long speeches is a thing of no interest to him ; the odd fact is that he should at the same time move us. It is this oddity, this discovery of a sensation which appeals to the sceptic. To the man's art he does not for its own sake give a thought. He has no sense of its existence apart from his immediate reaction to it ; he is conscious only of his reaction ; he is grateful to it merely as the provider of a stimulant.

What if he is himself one who practises the arts ? Remember Clark Storey, in Mr Behrman's *The Second Man*. In



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such time as he could find for it, Storey was a professional writer.

"You could make a fortune if you worked harder," a lady tells him. "I doubt it," he replies ; "I'm too intelligent to write commercial truck and incapable of writing great stuff. It's unfortunate. No, my dear. The only solution for me is to persuade you to marry me." <sup>1</sup>

Thus the sceptic as writer ends by writing very little. And this apathy will always descend upon him, unless he is obliged to make money, or unless his profession is one which demands regularity. Once make him a man of leisure, and his sense of proportion will sap his energy. He thinks nothing is worth doing for its own sake ; and if he has no need to do anything for his own, his occupation is apt to become vague.

There were moments, you remember, when Storey wished that someone would kill the second man within him ; and there are moments when all sceptics will feel themselves to be unwilling

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Man : a Comedy in 3 Acts.* By S. N. Behrman. 1928.

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captives of the sceptical sense of proportion. Occasionally they may envy the freedom of the conspirator ; occasionally they may long to deny their understanding. All of which means that scepticism has no future. The sceptic can strike out on no world-plans of his own ; he takes most readily to emotions which cannot be directly creative. His understanding of life was unconsciously formed—as is that of all periods—as an explanation of the conditions among which he grew. But his is an explanation which does not produce a new creative effort ; it produces merely a divided allegiance to what exists ; it will be superseded, because it has no will to survive.

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Nor does the sceptic think of the arts which anyone may practise—those of dancing and of conversation—as existing in their own rights. Post-War dancing is nothing but a comment on the music ; it is not a formal activity, but a statement of personal reaction to the music. Twentieth-century conversation is also the statement of personal reaction. It is a statement with words, and not with

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the body, and its reaction is not to a significant tune, but to a situation or a subject. It is no more speech in its own right than our dancing is movement in its own right. Both are commentaries ; and they are commentaries on a life that is empty of all values ; they are commentaries on a life which is felt to be a nothingness ; they emphasize the lack of anything which the sceptic takes more seriously than anything else.

Thus, in a modern revue or musical comedy, the music, the dialogue, and the dancing are all comments upon the absence of any subject which could be seriously treated. Neither show is set within any mould. Anything may occur. In a musical comedy the jokes which emphasize the plot, and the dancing which emphasizes the music, form lines of comment behind which lies nothing. In a revue the comments are strung together in one line, instead of being assembled in a mass. And these shows have zest both for performers and for audience because the comments are obviously conditioned by no scale of values. Where there is no scale to regulate the comments, there need be no limit to

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the ingenuity and extravagance of the comments themselves; and when the ingenuity is sufficiently assured, as in "*This Year of Grace*", your sceptic may become a familiar patron of the theatre.

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The rhythm of modern speech has been happily caught by Mr Galsworthy in the trilogy of novels<sup>1</sup> which he means to call "A Modern Comedy". The young English characters of these novels show you scepticism in action. Society hostesses, politicians, poets—they are all of them sceptics; they see their entertaining or their politics as the occupations which suit them at the moment. Speech is a comment upon these occupations or upon their emotions, and a comment which allows them no importance of their own. A conversation is a pooling of comments. And it is this refusal to set any inherent value upon their work or their emotions which Soames and his contemporaries are unable to fathom.

<sup>1</sup> *The White Monkey*, 1924; *The Silver Spoon*, 1926; *Swan Song*, 1928. All my quotations except the last (which is from *The Silver Spoon*) are from *The White Monkey*.

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They see an image of their own consciousness in the Chinese picture of the White Monkey. The White Monkey eats the fruit, and throws away the rind, and wonders what it is all about. But the Fleurs, and Wilfrids, and Marjorie Ferrars have really gone one better than the Monkey. For they no longer wonder ; they no longer hope or expect to understand ; they have learnt to get through the day without it ; they have learnt to live from hand to mouth ; they are model sceptics.

And listen to their talk—see how it puts nothing forward, see how it is merely comment in vacuo. And at the back of your minds remember Irene, and Soames in his early days, and young Bosinney. Contrast the way they felt and the way they spoke of it with the way of the White Monkeys.

Listen to Fleur receiving her husband, her father-in-law, and a man who is in love with her.

“ Draw up. Cream, sir? Sugar, Wilfrid? Ting has had too much, don’t feed him. Hand things, Michael. I’ve heard all about the meeting at Snooks’? You’re not going to canvas for labour, Michael—

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canvassing's so silly. If anyone canvassed me, I should vote the other way at once."

"Yes, darling; but you're not the average elector."

Listen to Wilfrid's love-making:—

"But you have what they" (the moderns) "haven't, Fleur—power to turn one's head. And mine is turned. You know it."

"How would Michael like that—from you, his best man?"

"Ugly, isn't it? Put that dam dog down, Fleur; I can't see your face. If you were really fond of Michael—I swear I wouldn't; but you're not, you know."

"You know very little. I *am* fond of Michael."

"Oh yes; not the sort that counts."

"It counts quite enough to make one safe."

"A flower that I can't pick . . . Quite sure, Fleur? Quite, quite sure? The moment I believe that I shall go East."

"East?"

"Not so stale as going West, but much the same—you don't come back."

Fleur thought "the East? I should

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like to know the East. Pity one can't manage that too. Pity."

"You won't keep me in your Zoo, my dear. I shan't hang around and feed on crumbs. You know what I feel. It means a smash of some sort."

"It hasn't been my fault, has it?"

"Yes. You've collected me as you collect everybody that comes near you . . . " (And at a rendezvous in the Tate Gallery he picks up the same thought) . . . "I'm a bit of Ming that you don't want to lose. But it's not good enough, my dear. And that's all about it."

"How horrible of you Wilfrid!"

"Well. Here we part. Give us your flipper."

"Wilfrid—I-I don't know . . ."

Through Desert passed the bitter thought—"She can't let go she doesn't know how." But he said quite softly: "Cheer up, my child. You'll be over that in a fortnight. I'll send you something to make up. Why shouldn't I make it China—one place is as good as another? I'll send you a bit of real Ming, of a better period than this . . ."

"What is it that you want of me?"

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“ Oh no—Come. This is going over it twice. Besides, since Friday I have been thinking. I want nothing, Fleur, except a blessing and your hand. Give it me ! Come on ! ”

Listen to an invitation to one of Fleur's lunch-parties. “ Dear Wilfrid—Wednesday—lunch : Wilmer, Hubert Marsland, two other women. Do help me live it down. Yours ever, FLEUR.”

Listen to Mr Galsworthy's comments on Fleur's feelings when she first visits Wilfrid.

“ On the top floor Wilfrid was standing in the open doorway, pale as a soul in purgatory. He took her hand gently and drew her in. Fleur thought with a little thrill ‘ Is this what it's like ? Du côté de chez Swann ? ’ . . . She was afraid to sit down for fear he might begin to follow the authorities . . . She knew she was not playing the game according to *La Garçonne* and Amabel Nazing ; that, indeed, she was in danger of going away without having added to her sensations . . . But now safe in her own room . . . she felt curious as to what she would have been feeling if things had gone as far as was proper according to the



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authorities. Surely she had not experienced one-tenth of the thoughts and sensations that would have been assigned to her in any advanced piece of literature! It had been disillusioning, or else she was deficient, and Fleur could not bear to feel deficient."

Listen to the interview, provoked by the former, between Wilfrid and Michael.

"What's wrong, Wilfrid?"

"You've got to know. I'm in love with Fleur."

"What!"

"I'm not going to play the snake. You're up against me. Sorry, but there it is. You can let fly!"

". . . Instinctively he dived for his cigarette-case,—Instinctively handed it to Desert. Instinctively they both took cigarettes, and lighted each other's. Then Michael said: Fleur—knows?"

"She doesn't know I'm telling you—wouldn't have let me. You've nothing against her yet. I couldn't help it."

"Decent of you to tell me; but—aren't you going to clear out?"

"I thought so; but it seems not."

"Seems? I don't understand."

"If I knew for certain I'd no chance—

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but I don't. Look here it's no good keeping gloves on. I'm desperate and I'll take her from you if I can."

"Good God, it's the limit!"

"Yes! rub it in! But I tell you when I think of you going home with her, and of myself, I advise you not to rub it in."

"Well, as this isn't a Dostoievsky novel, I suppose there's no more to be said."

"You realize, at least, that I've gone out of my way—perhaps dished myself—by telling you. I've not bombed without declaring war."

"No."

"You can chuck my books over to some other publisher . . . Good night, then. Sorry for being so primitive."

Listen to Michael and Fleur an hour or so later.

"Wilfrid's been telling me."

"Oh! What business—how do you mean 'telling you'?"

"Just that he's in love with you—nothing more—there's nothing more to tell, is there?"

"Of course, there's nothing more. If Wilfrid chooses to be so silly."

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“ Is that the end of Wilfrid then ? ”

“ The end ? I don’t know.”

“ Well, don’t forget I love you awfully.”

“ Am I likely to ? ”

The sceptical rhythm is unmistakable. The restless allusions, the toying with slang, the misapplication of old-fashioned idioms, the hurried defensiveness of phrasing, the sense of loneliness in a world in which everything has been robbed of objective significance—you will find nothing of this in the pre-Monkey days when Soames was young and Fleur unborn. And don’t imagine that Michael’s championing of Foggartism is in any way out of keeping with the sceptical view of work.

“ On the evening of her 22nd birthday Michael had come home saying :

‘ Well, my child, I’ve chucked publishing. With old Danby always in the right—it isn’t a career.’

‘ Oh ! Michael, you’ll be bored to death.”

‘ I’ll go into Parliament. It’s quite usual and about the same screw.’

“ He had spoken in jest. Six days later it became apparent that she had listened in earnest.”

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Michael had spoken in jest because his taking up politics involved no more than a change of occupation and a consequent change in the rewards desired. It did not mean that henceforth he was to see life in terms of party principles. Fleur had listened in earnest because she was pleased by the idea of that occupation for him . . .

The maturity of these characters makes them more definite examples of scepticism than you could expect of men and women who are still undergraduates. But the mentality of the Monts' set is the mentality of the modern undergraduate. As Michael regards his politics, so the typical Union man regards his. As Marjorie Ferrar regards her acting, so the typical O.U.D.S. man regards his. And the prevalence of this regarding has to some extent affected the outlook of older folk. In self-defence they are often obliged to adopt a style of comment.

\* \* \*

You will have observed that Mr Galsworthy's women use the same manner of speech as do his men. And this makes us reflect upon the contribution of woman

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to the movements of the day. What is the attitude of woman to the conspiracy? what future does she envisage?; can we learn anything from a study of the women's colleges?

The average girl who goes up to Oxford or Cambridge intends—sceptic though she is—to work seriously for a degree. Of the average man this is, of course, not true. He was a sceptic before ever he 'came up', and as such will exert himself only under pressure. The university brings little of it to bear upon him; and thus a week or two of Oxford or Cambridge is enough to convince him that in these cities, and in places within reach of them, he can enjoy a freer life than has ever been possible before or will ever be so in future. Never again will he be able to push thought of his nominal work so far into the future; never again will he be exempt from financial worry; never again will he have long holidays in which, if his curiosity so prompts him, he can wander across new countries; never again will he be allowed to make so many mistakes with so great an impunity; never again, in a word, will he enjoy the advantages of minority

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along with so few of its drawbacks. Eight men out of ten regard their time at the university as an interlude. And it is during this time that their scepticism is confirmed. They proceed to make their life at the university as different as is possible from the school life which they have already experienced, and from the professional life which they see ahead.

The undergraduette has no chance to emphasize this difference. She would not be at the university unless some promise of scholarship had made her parents feel justified in the outlay of fees. For a man the university is part of the natural order ; but a woman cannot take the idea in her stride ; for her it is a novelty, and requires a conscious purpose to explain it. And if she has no purpose of her own, there are women dons who are only too ready to furnish her with one. Not only does she 'come up' with a more definite object than is entertained by most men, but she is held to it by greater attention from the Powers that be. The object is in many cases the achievement of a good degree, and it is desired as a recommendation for posts as a teacher. Thus a woman's

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career at the university is apt to be an investment against the immediate future. She is too busy to contribute much to the present. Most of her recreations are taken apart from the company of men ; and if they were not, it would mean a check to business. The life of the undergraduette is like the life of a man who has ' gone down '. Both are sceptics, and both must work.

Most women make bad conspirators, because they are concerned with life as it is. They are the mothers of the next generation ; and they care for stability ; they want a settled polity in which their sons may grow up. And though nobody could think present conditions are settled, and though, as a sceptic, she allows them no absolute importance, the interests of most people are none the less vested in them. And woman thus approves. Very few of her sex will pay heed to the conspirators, because they will not busy their minds with a re-organized future. They will not subordinate their personal life ; they think in terms of this personal life ; they know that the future is contained in it. So what could a conspiracy mean to them ? The idea of the conspiracy

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is an escape from considerations of self and of the present ; conspiracy means the service of a non-personal cause ; it means the giving of yourself to other ends than those of everyday. And here is nothing which commends itself to the average woman.

There is no difference between the scepticism of modern men and women. Since her life has been passed more continuously than his amid ' the whirl of small excitements ', her illusions about it will have faded even quicker. But this whirl will grow in popularity, just because none could entertain illusions of its importance. If you join in that whirl, you will suffer no disenchantment ; it will take nothing from you, for you could expect nothing of it. In politics or in the theatre you might still hope to find a vitality of its own, and your hope would be disappointed. So, if possible, why not leave them alone ?

The life of the average undergraduate strikes his seniors as a quest of pleasure. So does that of the average young woman who is not at a university. But there is no quest about it. Both know there is nothing to be found ; both know it is



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all give on their part, and that pleasure will come only from their own effort. Both realize that a night-club has no more to give them than has a lecture-room or an office. But the night-club, being a twentieth century institution, has no pretensions to giving you anything, while a lecture-room or an office has. So they will go on frequenting places of amusement because this is to take the line of least resistance. It is less effort than to seek amusement in their own society. And similarly, they approve of money and of luxury because they save trouble.

“ All the great words, it seemed to Connie, were cancelled for her generation: love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband. All these great dynamic words were half dead now, and dying from day to day. Home was a place you lived in, love was a thing you did not fool yourself about, joy was a word you applied to a good Charleston, happiness was a term of hypocrisy used to bluff other people, a father was an individual who enjoyed his own existence, a husband was a man you lived with and kept going in spirits. As for sex, the last of the great

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words, it was just a cocktail term for an excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more raggy than ever. Frayed? It was as if the very material you were made of was cheap stuff, and was fraying out to nothing.

“All that really remained was a stubborn stoicism; and in that there was a certain pleasure. In the very experience of the nothingness of life, phase after phase, *étape* after *étape*, there was a certain grisly satisfaction. So that's that. Always this was the last utterance: home, love, marriage, Michaelis. So that's that—And when one died, the last words to life would be: so that's that!

“Money? Perhaps one couldn't say the same there. Money one always wanted. Money, success, the bitch-goddess, as Tony Dukes persisted in calling it, after Henry James, that was a permanent necessity. You couldn't spend your last sou, and say finally: So that's that! No, if you lived even another ten minutes, you wanted a few more sous for something or other. Just to keep the business mechanically going, you wanted money. You had to

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have it. Money you *have* to have. You needn't really have anything else. So that's that !

" Since, of course, it's not your own fault you are alive. Once you are alive, money is a necessity, and the only absolute necessity. All the rest you can get along without, at a pinch. But not money. Emphatically that was that." <sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

In Oxford and Cambridge we hear a band of conspirators crying in a wilderness of White Monkeys. You may think that the White Monkeys will quickly allow the former to gain control. It may seem as if they would at no time do more than oppose a passive resistance. Why should they not serve a conspiracy without adjusting their own outlook ? ; if they can serve a business with success, why not instead serve a conspiracy ? ; what difference need it make to them ?

Unfortunately these questions are irrelevant. Before it can be served, the conspiracy must be established. The

<sup>1</sup> *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, by D. H. Lawrence, privately printed, 1928.

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conspiracy cannot become a world directorate until the conspirators are in a majority. They are bent on saving not themselves, but the whole community ; so they must try to convert the sceptical majority, or else outlive it. And it is impossible to convert the sceptics, for you can never get at their minds. The sceptic's mentality is defensive ; he has no wish to be saved ; he acknowledges no racial purpose which we could fulfil ; he is not interested. Your only course is to put something in the place of that institutional framework with which the sceptics are content. But the party of the conspiracy gains strength too slowly for a new order to replace it in the life-time of my contemporaries.

The conspirator must await the next generation, and the defensiveness of the sceptic will allow him to influence it. With the help of propaganda he may catch the next generation young, and may prevent it from taking on its fathers' sense of proportion. But he must reckon with the likelihood of the next generation affording even poorer material for a conspiracy than does mine. He must know that, as judged by

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conspiratorial standards, the modern sceptic has no will to live. For he does not will the perpetuation of himself in a stronger and more efficient race. And unless the conspirator can get hold of them at once, it is unlikely—even should the parents welcome it—that the sceptics' children would grow up with more sense of the future. The conspirator must thus aim before all things at a control of education. He hasn't a moment to lose.

And it is likely that he will get it. For the sceptics will become so bored with their own outlook that they will encourage their children to think quite differently. They feel that their mentality acts as a brake upon their own creativeness, and though they cannot change this mentality, they will be quite ready for their sons to develop on other lines. So long as it does not affect them personally they will feel kindly enough disposed to the conspiracy. They realize that the future will be the future of a conspiracy, and they will wish to equip their children for a life under its conditions.

So they will allow the conspirator to reform the system of education. They

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will wish as a matter of expediency, that their children shall think as differently from themselves as is possible.

We all know the broad lines on which the new education will run. It will be an extension of those methods in use at the schools which conspirators will already have formed for their own children. Mr Wells and Mr Bertrand Russell have often written of the new methods. Mr Wells has told us that "the instinct and purpose of the religious type is to keep hold on the comprehensive drama," and "to escape from the aimless drive and compulsion of accident and everyday."<sup>1</sup> And it is in the acceptance of the aimless drive and compulsion that the irreligion of modern scepticism lies. For the sceptic a conspiracy, like any other form of religion, is a quaint attempt to give aim to what is aimless, and to force a cosmic significance upon accident and everyday. But the new education will give you a "hold upon the comprehensive drama". It will show you the perspective in which to look at the past ; it will supply you with a measure for all you do ; it will, in a word, be religious.

<sup>1</sup> *The Open Conspiracy*, p. 94.

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The new education will be inspired by a conscious purpose, to which each step will contribute. It will fashion your outlook in accordance with a definite plan. The whole idea of the conspiracy takes rise from a set of historical, biological, and sociological realisations; and at school these will be summarized for you as they exist up to date. Pupils will find themselves in a world which is agreed upon certain economic and biological principles, and which is organized in accordance with them. But our universities will have no place in that world. The conspiracy will cut out of the body politic anything which we should recognise as such.

\* \* \*

The community of the future may not live under an order which the Open Conspirators have yet described. But it will certainly not be sceptically directed. It may be one in which the sceptics have become so feeble that they act as unprofitable servants of the conspiracy; or it may be one in which scepticism has been genuinely eradicated by the new education. But some form of

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conspiracy you cannot keep out. A new order of life as a going concern is certain to emerge from the old, which is ours, and which is sceptical. And the order of the conspiracy—of a world politically and economically unified—is the order whose emergence we must expect. We must be prepared for conspiratorial groups with a common policy to manage our collective affairs. These groups would get rid of the universities as we know them ; the conspiracy will modify them out of recognition ; for their method in no way meets the requirements of the future.

We have seen that the university of to-day affords men a time of rest between the age when they leave school and the age when they begin to earn their living. During this time they can put their mental houses in order, and can think what mode of life will be suitable. Through every kind of experiment they can arrive at some knowledge of themselves. It is a time when they can grow with the minimum of arbitrary pruning and dressing from without. Their growth is not stunted by premature burdening with a money-making career.



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But, of course, the conspirator sees the whole business as a waste of time. This seclusion from the work-a-day world, this loss of touch with the practical forces of the day, is anathema to him. He thinks of the university as an unweeded garden which goes to seed through lack of expert care. Three years as an undergraduate is a holiday which the community cannot allow. Its young men cannot thus be spared. To let them lose their time, and waste their serious impulses at so critical an age, is out of the question. The conspiracy has no use for the universities' annual output of "pleasant, easy-going, evasive young men, up to nothing in particular and schooled out of faith, passion or ambition".<sup>1</sup> The conspiracy knows that our universities will always breed sceptics. It won't so far tempt its young men.

After the age of 16 or 17 there will be no more teaching. Up to that time the outlook proper to a conspirator—first suggested in the Wellsian *Outline of History*—will be imparted to you in schools. Schools will set before you the

<sup>1</sup> *The World of William Clissold*, vol. iii, by H. G. Wells, 1926.

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data for personal and political activity within a world commonwealth ; schools will teach you to recognise and to choose conduct which furthers our progress towards world unity, mental and material ; schools will organize and direct the particular impulses towards progress which each may possess. Thus will proceed that subordination of the personal life which the conspiracy demands, and which the modern university combats. After leaving school you will study the branch of world-enterprise which you have chosen ; and you will study it on the scene of its action.

\* \* \*

There will be no more settlements in which young men can spend their late 'teens and early twenties. There will be no more settlements with local interests, such as sport, or musical and dramatic societies. In their place we shall have research stations. These will not be concerned with the business of teaching. They will be the home of professional students who gather knowledge, and who present it to the world at large. Some of them will be concerned with Daedalist problems ;

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and the future of Daedalism hangs upon the influence of their results. But these stations will afford no general instruction ; there will be no degrees ; nobody will seek to graduate ; nobody will regard them as a stage in his or her career.

The research stations will, of course, receive young students who have left school. But the students will attend in the hope of being made permanent secretaries or assistant investigators. They will be men and women who mean to devote their lives to research. These stations will be the permanent scene of people's work ; they will not, like the modern university, be places where students pass a few years before taking up a professional burden. The nearest approach to these stations of the future is made by the women's college of to-day. Imagine a college in which not most of but all the women, and not a few of but all the men, are bent upon increasing the store of human knowledge ; imagine a college in which everyone has invested his or her life ; imagine a college which is in touch with others of its kind all over the world ; imagine a college which is

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thus part of a world university ; and you have the research station of to-morrow.

I doubt if you will find one established in Oxford or in Cambridge. Climatic considerations would tell against them with the conspiracy ; but, after its research stations are once established, there is no further reason why the conspiracy should not take over the old universities. The history of the victorious conspiracy will be an extension to the old institutions of the methods in use at its own. Thus it will remould the traditional public schools in the image of its own schools, and no reform of the universities is possible until a reform of the schools has first been made. From a reform of the schools will follow the desertion of Oxford and Cambridge and the founding of research stations for those who will devote themselves to the cause of knowledge.

Oxford and Cambridge will be unable to equip men for participation in the new society ; and the more surely the new society develops, the more obviously unsuitable will they appear. Given the new education in schools, given a unification of enterprise, our need of a modern

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university disappears. The institution of the university will continue. The research stations will be the university as created by the conspiracy, just as the Oxford and Cambridge of to-day are the university as created by the sceptics. Modern Oxford and Cambridge would seem as unlike a university to a man of the 18th century as the research stations of the future would seem unlike one to ourselves. But in *Alma Mater* I have tried to throw light upon both these forms of the university; I have tried to account for the mentality which requires the sceptical university of to-day and the mentality which will require the conspiratist university of to-morrow.

In the modern university you will see scepticism in a setting of its own. But what you will not see is a group of young men discussing their own mentality at the street corner, and expounding it to the elderly visitor. You are much more likely to hear a few contemptuous references to the exposition of their mentality which I have given in this book. I cannot too often insist that the mentality of an age is formulated less in the conscious statement of its

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views—particularly when its members are still young—than in the modifications which it effects upon the institutional framework of its life.

If you wish to study scepticism, do not talk to an undergraduate about what he believes, but watch him in the course of his daily life. Watch the significance which he will give to a tutorial, or a game, or a party, or an evening at the George in Oxford, or at the Festival Theatre in Cambridge. Watch what he makes of these things; observe the new shape which he confers on them; observe how he adapts them to a new sense of fitness. You will then know something of his mentality, whereas if you ask “Surely you don’t think as that fellow says you do in *Alma Mater*?” , you will merely disconcert him. He has probably never heard of the book.

I have tried to explain that small conspiratist section of youth which will soon take charge of our course, and to describe the type of university which it will substitute for our own. The conspiratist minority will outlive the sceptical majority because it has a will to do so, and its uniform education and

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research station will replace the sceptical public school and the sceptical university. The Alma Mater of to-morrow will have fewer children than she has to-day. They will come to her not in order to learn ; they will come to assist a special order of world work. The university will have no atmosphere or traditions of its own. It will be a practical department of world activity. As an institution, it will be nothing but the sum total of its students ; and they will be in touch with students of similar departments all over the world. The mutual interest of these departments will form a world university. So may the work go well.

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