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EDUCATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

(continued from previous page)

insecure, and could well fail to withstand the strain of orderly reconstruction if we concentrate solely upon the material and economic aspects of our problem.

The Sense of Frustration

It is a common saying among observers of such things that the youth of the post 1914-18 generations has

suffered from a sense of frustration. Youth, of course, if it thinks at all, has always dashed itself hopefully against the bars that stand between it and its aspirations. But never before, I think, at any rate in the democracies, have so many felt that there was not enough on the other side of the bars to make any effort worth while. In England, the note struck by T. S. Eliot in his great poem *The Waste Land* was predominant throughout that 20 years. In America, the confusion of the period produced a confusion of voices—though some of the voices, as I have said, gave hopes for better things. In Australia, the keynote was an indifference to any but economic motives—an indifference fostered by our systems of education which despite some lip service to other ideals have in fact been dominated by a vocational outlook which has infected all our thinking and all our doing.

In all these three countries, which for want for a better name we must continue to call democracies, the first and toughest reality of reconstruction to be faced will be that its basic raw material, by which it must stand or fall, will consist of young and middle-aged people who spring from that background of puzzlement, of frustration, of passive indifference, or active discontent. That raw material will not be easily malleable. Some will come back from travels, fights, and adventures that would have turned Ulysses green with envy—and of these some will be ready to attack the future with regenerated ideals; others—and I think the majority—will view it with the suspicion that comes of complete disenchantment. Others again will have spent long months and years in comparative inactivity and have rusted into discontent. Others, who have played their part in industry, may well reach the peace with their old concentration on economic motives intensified by the spurious prosperity of war. There is no reason whatever to suppose that there will be a general and disinterested desire to tackle the difficulties of peace on the part of those who will be displaced by its coming; and no prints, however blue, of reconstruction will be worth the paper they are written on unless they represent something much more than a facade and take into account the psychological problem I have outlined.

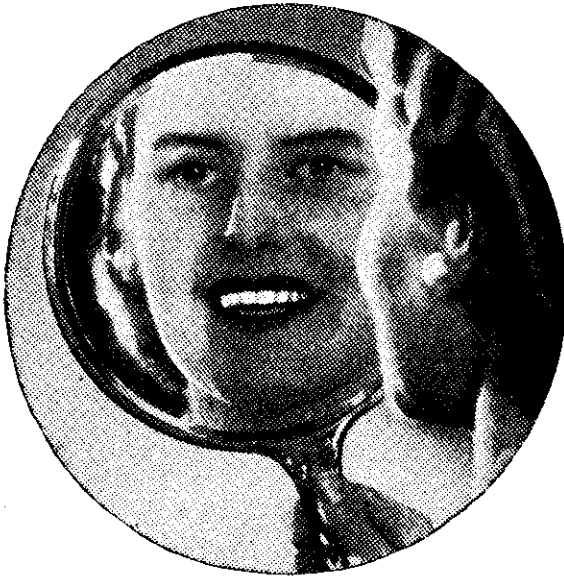
"I Am Frightened"

It will be acute and dangerous in all three countries. There will be fertile ground for all manner of disorder, in fact for a state of things which may well bring essential victory to Hitler even after his armies have been dispersed to the four winds of heaven. It is easy to say—as many do in Australia—"Oh, things are different here. Democracy is rooted in the minds and hearts of all of us. We are different from the old countries." I agree. We are different, different in that we have less efficient defences against the ultimate enemy than they. I have no fear for Great Britain. I believe that in the United States of America there is a sufficient spiritual toughness—though it is sometimes difficult to discern—to surmount the dangers of the next 20 years. But I am frightened about ourselves. We have been wandering between two worlds for so long, and we have so little in the way of counterweight to oppose to the forces that will confront us. That counterweight could have been supplied by education—and it can only add to the apprehensions that much be in the minds of all thoughtful people that we are not at present prepared to do more than palter with its future. (To be continued)

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