

RE*SETTLING

The UNSETTLED

By MAHON COX
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WHATEVER MAY be said—and a good deal has been said of late in *The Spectator* on the “defeated” or “submerged” generation, and as to whether the pre-war younger set were more or less suppressed than their fathers in their youths—life amongst the junior members of the Services leaves one in little doubt that many of them did experience a feeling of frustration before the war, and that the responsibility of their war jobs has determined them never to accept it again.

The young men in the Forces who now wonder why they were content to perform the dull and limited tasks which brought them livelihoods in peacetime—and privately state their intentions of never again so submitting, though publicly they are less vociferous than many journalists would have their readers believe—these young men now often are less fitted for responsibility in future peacetime conditions than when they occupied humbler and less vital posts in the pre-war era. It is the more unfortunate that this should have come about through their own meritorious actions, and without any fault in themselves.

In service messes to-day one sees young men with old faces; young men who talk about their jobs with the technical knowledge and living experience of a veteran on his own speciality. They speak after weighing up the facts through having seen for themselves, and then having survived by using courage and thought to overcome the difficulties. These are youths who a few years ago had never sat in an aircraft cockpit, or stood on a bridge, or commanded more than their typists and office-boys.

Yet qualification in one profession is no qualification in another; qualification

in killing is no qualification in living. War presents only another aspect of the familiar plight of the school-boy prodigy on the games-field; when he has taken off his school-cap he has to begin again on level terms with his old school-fellows whom he has led in their games, and the chances are that they will lead him this time. The good all-rounder is very rare. So the “ace” fighter-pilot, having become an “ace” because of his absorption in his job, will find himself competing in circumstances of which he has no knowledge, and because of the devotion which made him excel in his specialized job he will lack the flexibility of mind and imagination which will be needed to mould his new life.

Because of the speed of modern war an expert in one subject has to concentrate all his energies on that one thing, and has no time or effort left for concurrent development in other directions. Under these conditions the average mind sets quickly, and finds difficulty in starting afresh on unknown ground. No doubt many of those who have given up their professions, and in so doing have forgotten much of what was once familiar knowledge, will pass rapidly through the period of transition necessary on their return to their old occupations. But for the younger ones, those who left school to become soldiers and sailors and airmen, and who have never known any other mode of adult living, the readjustment will be great.

There is a most important aspect which must not be left out of calculations of the post-war change-over. The mental effect of these war years has been terrific; breakdowns in mental—as opposed to moral—characters have become frequent. Many specialists have