THE MUSINGS OF AN IDLE MAN.

By COLONEL R. H. FIRTH, C.B.

I.

At mess, a few evenings ago, the conversation turned on the relative value of the sciences and the humanities as educational methods. As a man who has trifled with both, the temptation was irresistible to say a good deal. I do not propose to cover the ground over which our arguments wandered, but rather to jot down certain reflections on the broad question as they occurred to me the following day while lazing in a field. Clearly, both the scientific and the human method are approaches to a common end, which is the improvement of the world. The characteristic of the scientific method is that it makes its god in its own image, has a point of view of its own and maintains it dogmatically; it treats men objectively and is concerned with our actions on them while ignoring the effect of their actions on us. Suppose we take the case or question of duty; by the scientific method this means our duty to others and, having discovered what our duty is, it allows the others no right of appeal. On the other hand, the human method takes the point of view of the people whose interests are under discussion and, in the case of duty, recognizes that I am myself and that you are yourself and does not admit that any others exist. Obviously, as methods, the scientific and the human are opposed, but they have the same object and each is necessary to the other.

The current phrase, "the greatest good for the greatest number" reveals aptly the scientific mind, as it thinks of men as units. Humanism or the humanities can make nothing of that formula, because it cannot regard man as a unit to be totalled, subtracted, multiplied or divided, but rather as a queer being of whom you can never predicate his next action. The eccentricity of man, science reduces to an average, whereas to humanism the average is eccentric. One can almost say that science issues commands while humanism issues entreaties. The difference between the two is that between the man who begins by giving you a penny and the man who begins by asking if you would like a penny. Both aim at doing you good and both desire your co-operation; but the scientific defines the form any co-operation must take, while the human leaves you free to choose the form for yourself. Similarly, in matters of self-defence the scientific method allows us the right of self-defence only against those who would do us harm. The human method allows, in addition, the right of self-defence against those who want to do us good. The first is the more logical and consistent, the second the more generous. From this it follows that the humanities never press a reform upon men without first consulting them as to whether they want the particular reform. Science concedes the same point but discounts it by insisting that people do not know what they want and consequently claims the right to inform them.
The Musings of an Idle Man

If one is correct in these views, it is obvious that the world would be in a bad way if either science or the humanities were left in exclusive possession of the field. In the one event there would be intolerable tyranny, and in the other intolerable confusion. We should gain nothing by the final overthrow of either school; on the contrary, our best interests are secured by both methods continuing to gain in strength and determination. Very much as the best football is seen when the two opposing teams are evenly matched, so in philosophy the clearest light is that which arises from the keenest opposition. The conclusion, therefore, is that if science injures humanism it weakens its own inspiration, and the humanism which injures science destroys its own tools. This brings us back to the fundamental axiom, that the value of everything in life depends on a certain admixture with its opposite. So we need not be surprised if the ultimate relation of science and the humanities is that of hating and loving each other at the same time.

As regards the main theme which started these reflections, it is of the utmost importance that our higher education should not become materialistic through too narrow a regard for practical efficiency. As the mother of all technical knowledge, science is essential to our industrial prosperity and national safety, but its limitations are so defined that it is impossible to accept it as a complete scheme of education because education is and must be nothing less than a preparation for the whole of life. It should introduce the future citizens of the community not merely to the physical structure of the world in which they live but also to the deeper interests and problems of politics, thought and human life. It must acquaint them with the capacities and ideals of mankind, as expressed in literature and art, with its ambitions and achievements as recorded in history, and with the nature and laws of the world as interpreted by science, philosophy and religion. As a means to this end, the limitations of science divorced from the humanities are definite. If we neglect science, we get but an imperfect knowledge of the world around us; but if we ignore or subordinate the other elements of knowledge as opened by the humanities, we cut ourselves off from aspects of life of even greater importance. Our aim should be a training which gives width of view and flexibility of intellect. Science itself, industry and commerce will be most successfully pursued by men whose education has stimulated their imagination and widened their sympathies. In this education, the study of the literature of Greece and Rome must have a large part, because our whole civilization is rooted in the history and mode of thought of those lands and peoples. We do not need either science or the humanities to be rampant to the exclusion of the other, but we need both working in all the branches of our education so that it may develop human faculty and the power of thinking clearly to the highest possible degree. In this sense, one conceives no direct hostility between science and the humanities, neither hating the other as a rival, but rather loving one another as rivals for knowledge and progress. May it be so.
II.

At parade service, the other day, our padre gave us a homily on avoiding worldliness. He spoke of it from the religious point of view, therefore I do not propose here to criticize his arguments or teaching, but rather to set down some thoughts which his allusions to worldliness suggested. From the lay point of view, worldliness means a knowledge of the world and is no class vice. As a matter of fact, it is not a vice but merely the misuse of a gift which is to a great extent intuitive. Most of us wish to have a knowledge of the world, and some wish it so keenly that they think they have attained it. We men admire it in each other, but few of us entirely like it in our women. The worldly-wise woman has a sense of superiority and she is apt to make it felt. She goes armed, and has seldom that hesitation to inflict pain which characterizes adorable women. In spite of that we forgive her much because she bores no one. This suggests the doubt whether worldliness is to be found in the very highest characters. Certainly not in those whom we call very lovable people, because these latter usually have a simplicity or innocence all their own which verges on the maladroit, and which is a characteristic men of the world conspicuously lack. All the same, it is the simple lovable people who are the salt of the earth, as they believe in the world, not having been born to know it.

What the French call savoir faire comes quite naturally to some boys and girls, but on the whole one is inclined to think that a fairly hard life is more likely to make a man worldly-wise than an easy one. Suffering sharpens wits in all directions, and worldliness in its most crude form is more common where the struggle to live begins early and is continuous. Talk to the woman of the slums and she will tell you that she "knows her company," which is but the shrewd cynic saying that she sees through it, has no illusions, and tastes its bitterness. In its finer sense, worldliness is found in the better classes and there to know the world is to like the world, perhaps not untinged with a contempt for it and a desire to worry it. This reminds me of a true but curious fact that two worldly-wise people seldom mate together. If they did, enthusiasm in the children could hardly exist. This may be the clue to the answer to the question, Why do so many able men marry fools? It is because they have too much ideality and seek an object for worship, and the few women who deserve worship are those who have not too much of that worldly common sense and social presence of mind which distinguish a woman of the world. Of course, it may be said that fools have not those attributes either, but saints and fools are easily confused when they are young and pretty. The most objectionable feature in worldly wisdom is the sense of self-satisfaction which it engenders. This is confirmed by the circumstance that those who bring about improvements in the world are not those who have the greatest knowledge of the world. If we recall the truly great men, it is hard to say of any one of them that he was a complete man of the world.
The conclusion forces itself that men and women with a knowledge of the world are so interested in the drama of life that they care for nothing outside it. The only compensation lies in the thought, perhaps it is as well that in this transitory life there are some people who do succeed in making themselves thoroughly at home.

III.

The big part which the Dardanelles and its adjacent coast have played in our recent history tempted me to look up our old friend Homer, and so while away some odd hours. I remember well, as a boy, regarding Homer's stories as a myth invented solely to worry the youth of later generations. Homer himself may be a myth, but his Troy certainly is not, for we know that the Mycenaean walls have been uncovered and explored at Hisarlik. It is difficult to suppress the wish to go and see the place, for one can no longer disbelieve in it than, in spite of the Minotaur, one can disbelieve in the Cretan labyrinth. The theory of the schools was, that the Homeric story was but a transplantation of legends and that the Trojan war was but a reflex of some war fought elsewhere and, in much the same way, regarded Achilles and Agamemnon as humanized gods passed down from pre-Hellenic times. One reads the story again in riper years and, as one thinks it over, we see Troy not only a fortress whose lord could levy toll on merchants from the south wishing to tranship their goods across the isthmus to the sea of Marmora, but we see Troy as a sentinel commanding the passage through the Dardanelles, the command of which passage was as important three thousand years ago as now. Old Greece needed corn and had to import it from the Euxine cornfields, and though old Thucydides hints that the whole story of the Trojan war "incredibly prevailed towards the fabulous," we feel, in the light of our own efforts to force the passage, that then as now a war did rage over the bone of contention and, moreover, a war characterized by equally noble and almost fabulous deeds.

History and Homer are clearly the same terms, though perhaps not untinged with the twining of fable about truth. Homer's Greece is very real and as interesting, if not more so, as the Greece of Constantine and Venezelos. Of course, there are many gaps we would like to see filled. We long to know the truth about the old Pelasgian inhabitants of that country, and of the Minoan civilization down to 1500 B.C., and how, a hundred years later, the Achaian warriors came from the north, conquering and building castles much as the Normans did in our own land some twenty-five centuries later. Oddly enough, I have recently re-read "Ivanhoe," and every Norman baron of that romance has his Homeric prototype, for Norman and Achaian are as twin brothers. Homer's warriors go forth to battle clad in mail, all disdainful of the common varlets, whom they slaughter like sheep, but ever ready for a combat with
a worthy foeman. Good eaters and drinkers are they all, lovers of the "larger mixing bowl" and the "lengthy chine," γότον διπλόκες; while, when the feast is over, they listen to the minstrel as he sings of love and devilry, κλέα ανδρόν ἤρωον. One imagines them all as hard men with few scruples, often wily like Odysseus and yet not more reverent of Zeus than Bois de Guilbert was of the Mass, but with just as keen an eye for fair women; men who would not give up a Briseis or a Helen, or starve when there was anything to be stolen; all the same, real men who loved life, lived to the full, and whose souls passed indignantly into Hades. It is a fine picture, for over them all ruled Agamemnon, perhaps no greater warrior than some of our Norman kings were, but, carrying the royal sceptre that Hephaestus wrought, he gave them that unity which makes for strength. Some of the old Greek barons were hard at times to keep in hand, and we conceive Achilles as troublesome as Hotspur, but in the end obeying. Though Agamemnon may not be an ideal personage, yet he is the central figure of the "Iliad," just as his palace fortress of Mycenaæ was the very centre of Greece. All roads led to Mycenaæ in those days, much as they lead now to Constantinople, and so we picture its occupant, close under the spider mountain, Ἄραχναῶν ὄρος, waiting to pounce upon any intruder. More than that, one recalls how the small city communities of old Greece created the intellectual life of Europe. In their literature we find models of thought and expression, and meet the subtle and powerful personalities who originated for the Western world all forms of poetry, history and philosophy, and even science itself, no less than the ideal of freedom and the conception of a self-governing democracy. For those ideals, our many dead rest on the arid slopes of Gallipoli and almost within sight of where Troy stood. It is all an old theme, but yet a fascinating theme in a time like the present when the Trojan war appears dwarfed as but a border foray. To write all this may savour little of medicine or of war, still it is a passing pleasure to break away and be able to forget both.

IV.

While I do not admit to being a persistent fault-finder, still I do plead guilty to a certain pleasure in noting faults, or what I think are faults, in others. It is a harmless vagary, but it affords me some amusement and helps to fill up time. If we look around us and contemplate our friends and acquaintances, it is astonishing to find how much a man's agreeableness depends upon his faults, and like his coat those faults may sit ill or well upon him. Thus, the same faults do not become rich and poor, or old and young, and many faults which mar a man would alienate a woman from us. We forgive boasting or excessive pride in some belonging to a poor man, but let a rich man boast and we at once are repelled. On the other hand, Dives may be a little inquisitive or interfering without incurring social ostracism, but Lazarus must be content to be reserved and retiring.
In the one case, the tendency to be officious is charitably supposed to spring from benevolence; in the other, a reserve is held to be becoming which in one more opulent would pass for pride. So again, we can forgive much to young people if only they are young enough, but even so there remain a few faults which suit the old only. A young man should never be sententious or pose as an intellectual, whereas an old man may be something of a prig and yet remain an agreeable friend. Conversely, contentiousness is as forgivable in a youth as it is detestable in an old man. The same can be said of philandering, which ever makes an old man appear as a fool, no matter how harmlessly he philanders; but in youth the prosecution of light-hearted love is no offence. A sharp tongue, with some hot temper, does not make us love pretty Kate the less, though the slightest suspicion of shrewishness in her mother suggests the giving of a wide berth to that lady.

A neat point occurs; it is this: Can a man alter his faults to suit the circumstances? I think so. I know two men, both of whom are arrant snobs. The predilection for the company of his social superiors suits one because his good manners and fine temper smooth his relations with all and sundry, making him no unpleasant companion. The other carries the garb of the courtier badly, and we detest him for a bumptious toady. It is difficult to explain the reasons for the difference, but a possible explanation is that the one knows his weakness and cultivates the corrective of all-round geniality; the other has never troubled to find out his defect or to take the hint of its existence from others. In the one case, the fault verges on the becoming, in the other it is repellent. The truth is we all have our faults and virtues, but some carry them better than others, or it may be that we do not go to the right spiritual tailor to have them properly fitted on.

V.

A man dropped in to lunch the other day, who was of a prepossessing appearance, had good manners, but particularly remarkable for a large forehead and brilliancy of his conversation. After he had gone away, some one remarked, "That was a brainy fellow." I demurred to the fitness of the comment and suggested that he would be described better as an intelligent fellow. The incident, trifling in itself, suggested later on a line of thought which may be worth following. The question is, Is to be brainy and to be intelligent the same thing? The answer would seem to be, no; because a man may possess a large and well-developed brain and yet be a great fool. Then what is a great fool? Obviously, he who possesses but mismanages a large and well-developed brain. The essence of the problem lies in the recognition that the possession of brains is one thing, their management is another. The only fallacy about this statement is that there may be a form of brain development which carries a guarantee for its right management. As it is, some years since I read anatomy and
physiology, I leave the proof of the fallacy to those who are better and more recently informed than myself.

Few will deny that of all the assets given to the use of man the brain is the most difficult to manage properly, and the range of its possible mismanagement is as wide as the penalties for that mismanagement are great. Of course, some may say the brain is self-managing, and the most highly developed brain the best managed. If so, what right has any one brain to interfere with any other in the management of its own affairs? And any reader objecting to my views is clearly interfering with my brain; moreover, he will not improve the situation by alleging that his is a bigger and a better managed brain than mine. No, the conclusion is obvious that high foreheads and big heads are no guarantee of wisdom, and the highly developed brain is as much the property of the rogue as of the philosopher. Further, if the progress of mankind be synonymous with the development of the human brain, then the final stage of progress may be the appearance of a race of ingenious rogues and fools. It appears then, we must fall back on something else which we may call intelligence.

But, what is intelligence? Frankly, I do not know, but I have no doubt as to its value. If I have a doubt, that doubt reposes on intelligence, appeals to intelligence and requires intelligence for its expression. The alternative would be that the doubt is meaningless. Without intelligence we could not know what was love, faith, instinct, intuition, or will, and many other things. Without intelligence, a man might think he was living by faith and yet be living by prejudice, or he would mistake bad reasoning for intuition. The more we think about it and use our intelligence, the greater is the tangle and the more we realize that no man requires so much or more intelligence as the man who turns his back on intelligence and decides to live by something else. It is useless to suggest that conscience will take its place, because it requires intelligence to know what conscience is and what it is not. Whichever way we look and however much we may argue, the fact presents itself that we are begging the question as to what is intelligence. Therefore because I cannot define intelligence it does not lessen the justness of my definition of our visitor, that he was an intelligent fellow rather than a brainy man. We have to be content with recognizing intelligence by its fruits, leaving it open to argument as to what are and what are not its fruits. The conclusion may not satisfy everyone, but it will produce less disagreement than any other, and at that it is wiser to leave it.

VI.

In the mess in which I live we have a man who is a bit of a character. He has had a varied career, from stowaway on a tramp steamer, through mining in Alaska and lumber rolling in Canada, to his present position as a captain in the new Army. Needless to say, he is full of interesting information, but his chief charm lies in his simple directness and independence,
for he has his own ideas with no scruples in declaring them, and a definite indifference to criticism. In contrast to him is another man who, though extremely well informed and experienced, is so sensitive and shy that it is only by constant association that his messmates realize his sterling worth or the value and range of his opinions. Like the other man, he is indifferent to criticism and yet sensitive to it.

I have often contemplated these two men, for they seem, in a way, to represent the main groups into which one's acquaintances fall. That is, there are those who resent criticism and those who do not; those who are preoccupied for the safety of their reputations and those who never give them a thought. A man indifferent to criticism is often called a strong man; he has, doubtless, some great qualities, but he is not without serious defects. Strong men are not always just men, as I know only too well from official experiences. And the man who does not mind injustice will often do injustice; moreover, in this respect, the so-called strong men get far more credit than they deserve, because prejudice is a common corollary of strength. The man who is above resenting what is said of him is above revenging himself; though he will not take offence, he frequently takes the offensive, and that unjustly. Equally, the sensitive or shy man has some weakness in his character, but he may have powers which the man made of sterner stuff is without. A man sensitive to criticism is sure to study his critics; he can accept suggestions and appropriate the moral and mental inspirations of other men, which means that he has more power of development than stiffer natures possess. Moreover, he is a better representative of others than a more naturally independent person can be, and this, combined with a stronger feeling for justice, marks him out as fitted to be a leader.

If we analyse the curious form of mental independence against which criticism is powerless, we find that it may be the result of more than one cause. In some men it is an innate quality, and in them arises either from sheer egotism or from sheer goodness. By this latter term is meant the quality which enables a man to hold himself answerable to no tribunal but the highest, and we can label that tribunal as being either God or conscience. Whether egotism is a vice is open to argument, for it depends on the ego. It is one of those qualities with which some people are born, and which they never shed. Though the egotist is more or less wrapped up in himself, it seems a mistake to label him dogmatically as either selfish or unlovable; if the ego be good, an egotist can be a saint just as, if the converse exists, he becomes a sinner. Egotism ever makes a person a definite character, and his characteristics can be as often good as bad. Apart from these causes, there is a type of independence which is not genetic. It is represented by people who are quite indifferent to what friends or foes say of them, because custom has made them content to be misunderstood. Most of us have met with instances of the kind, and not infrequently it is traceable to an upbringing in which, from infancy, the individual has been
trained not to expect sympathy. The result is, he has learned to live alone, and does not think that any man’s goodness or badness, ability or stupidity, has reference to his own particular ideas. Complete reserve of this kind is rare, but it exists.

In contrast to these people are those who take so much pleasure in notice that even blame is agreeable. We meet with this keen desire to be in the limelight often in children and, as an undignified trait, is best dismissed as a puerility. Then there are a few men and women who do demand sympathy, and wish to make a favourable impression on a few, and yet are sufficiently exclusive to be indifferent to public criticism. These people are met in all grades of society, and their peculiarity is that only a small circle of acquaintances are real to them, and to whose criticism they are sensitive; to them the rest of the world is an illusion or artificiality. These peculiar people belong generally to special cults and coteries. Their view of life simply proves them to be ill-endowed with imagination and, perhaps, after all, it is want of imagination which accounts for my two mesemates being, each in his own way, so indifferent to criticism.

VII.

It will be conceded that in attempting to trace the incidence of the infectious diseases, such as enterica, measles, diphtheria, small-pox, and scarlet fever, it is a case of cherchez l’homme, and that it is the human rather than the dead structural elements of our surroundings to which we must look for any persistence of infection or infectivity. For enunciating the opinion that the disinfection of rooms, billets, and houses, after these diseases, was unscientific, illogical, wasteful of public money, and suggestive of charlatanry, I was twitted recently as being unorthodox. Assuming that to be orthodox means to think what is right, then to be unorthodox means that I think what is wrong. I do not propose to discuss whether my views on the subject of disinfection are right or wrong, as that is a matter which can be best left to doctors; but I do propose to put down some ideas which are suggested by the quality of being either orthodox or unorthodox.

In the present day the application of the term orthodox has acquired something of a contemptuous sense. Thus, to say that an opinion is orthodox is tantamount to saying that it may be, and probably is, right, but it does not deserve to be. It is difficult to explain why this should be, but may it not be that some of us feel an impatience not really for the opinion held, but for the manner in which it is held? This means that the personal factor of the sayer tinges what is said. Truth in the abstract is simply truth, but directly men explain it or act on it, they seem to colour it with their own peculiarities. Of course this does not apply to scientific truths. These differ from any other kind of truth, because they only hold their place as truths owing to their being continually confirmed by experience. The confirmation by experience of many scientific truths is limited to the few
who have sufficient scientific knowledge to experience them. For the mass of people there is neither the knowledge nor experience, therefore they accept the opinion of those few, trusting them to believe nothing that is contrary to their experience. Indeed, it is a point of honour with the scientific conscience to believe nothing that is contrary to experience. Other truths, or what we may call moral truths, are concerned with facts which are within the experience of most people. It is true that some have to be acted upon without previous testing by experience, and we have to accept them because they are accepted generally. In doing this, there is the fallacy or danger that we may be acting not upon our own convictions but upon the convictions of others. Those convictions may be perfectly right, but if they are not our own, we cannot commend them to others, and the man that utters opinions without personal conviction expresses a mere platitude, and arouses that prejudice against truth which finds expression in the contemptuous use of the word orthodox.

If the foregoing train of thought is sound, it follows that to be unorthodox may be a creditable attitude. Unorthodoxy involves the taking of an independent line and it means that the man who elects to be unorthodox has, or should have, the merit of believing what he says and does. He expresses no platitude and may be an evangelist, though often, like another prophet, he may be crying in the wilderness. But there is ever the danger that unorthodoxy may get out of hand, leading to the airing of cranky ideas due to a loss of proper perspective. We need to distinguish between the unorthodoxy in small things and the unorthodoxy in matters of greater importance. The lesser unorthodoxy is often only a sacrifice of small to great things, and some may take pleasure in it as a protest against the sacrifice of great things to small. Thus, among the well-to-do, it is more unorthodox to be dirty than to be ungodly. Similarly, among the poor, it is less unorthodox to have an untidy house than to imitate the domestic order of the rich. If a man likes untidiness and disorder for their own sakes, then his unorthodoxy has begun to pervert his judgment, and he becomes himself a proof of the value of the lesser orthodoxy which he despises. So, a godly man who rolls deliberately in the mud to show his contempt of cleanliness proves thereby the value of cleanliness to both body and mind. Cleanliness and order in themselves are good things, and they are only objectionable when better things are sacrificed to them. Provided, therefore, we do not allow our unorthodoxy to go so far as to affirm that good things are bad, because they happen to inconvenience us, no harm results. The fact is, we cannot pick and choose among those things which the common consent of mankind has decided to be virtues or vices. If we do, we deny the whole moral sense and decry our own powers of judgment. Further, if we deny the justice of the emotions, or the rightness of a virtue, or a vice at any one point, we must deny it at all. But no one has ever succeeded in doing that, consequently unorthodoxy, whether of individuals or societies,
is always open to the criticism of being inconsistent. Therein lies the gist of the whole case; unorthodoxy is only discreditable when it is based on wrong premisses and so warps our judgment as to lead to illogical, unscientific and immoral actions. The allegation of my own unorthodoxy, therefore, remains to be proved; and the proof turns on whether the initial premiss on which it is based be devoid of scientific truth.

VIII.

A curious feature of this War is the number of young men who are holding comparatively high staff and administrative appointments. In my own service, I see the administrative charge of divisions in the hands of men some ten or twelve years below the age at which those positions were reached in normal times. It is the same with all other appointments, where it is rare to find a divisional commander over fifty, or a brigadier over forty-five. The converse prevails also to some extent, for the War has brought back to duty many men who had long since hoped to have shaken the dust of soldiering off their boots for good. But these men are mostly holding easy jobs.

As one looks around and ponders, one realizes how much the whole business of war has divided old men and young. The picture has its bright lights and also its shadows; these contrasts become all the more apparent in the amenities and familiarities of daily life in mess, where the greater number are young or relatively young men. Listening to their confident and cheery talk and also to their frequent iconoclastic generalizations, one realizes that there is a barrier between the old and young. It is difficult to avoid being critical, and one has to admit that youth is a fault which, though it is sure to mend, age does not always find it easy to forgive. Across the barrier, so hard to disguise, the generations discuss life. Old and young now put their shoulder to the wheel. Though a man be young and puts his shoulder to that wheel, you cannot put an old head on the shoulder; the same is true, in an opposite sense, of the old. They still have faith in old specifics for the cure of the world. The young have made a fresh diagnosis. They flout experience, turn a deaf ear to precedent and prescribe a new remedy.

The situation is not without humour and pathos. The conclusion asserts itself that, only by an effort of mental detachment can those of an older generation bring themselves to understand that the rising generation is going to live its own life, that its life will differ in many respects from our life, that its heroes will not be our heroes, nor its ideals our ideals; in a word, that the chicks of to-day are going to be the cockerels of to-morrow. Yet, in any true perspective of life, those coming on are probably just as worthy or just as unworthy of their places as the acknowledged actors of the past. The best parents are those who know when their children have become men and women, entitled to think and act for themselves, and that
friendly counsel and companionship must take the place of parental authority and tutelage. It seems a mere commonplace to say that we should judge each man of note on his merits, and not misjudge him because we have known him as a youngster and had not the wit to foresee that he was going to make his mark. Yet this is what many of us are constantly doing. We must give the young their due: we have had our day and doubtless enjoyed it. Anyhow, we must think we have. That is the true wisdom of advancing years, for undoubtedly half the art of life is the art of knowing when to abdicate.

IX.

When at home on recent leave, I filled up the dawdling hours of a wet afternoon by overhauling the contents of a long-forgotten box. What treasures I unearthed and what memories the sight of the old familiar objects raised! There were two old photograph albums and whole packets of loose photos, chiefly groups. This forgotten lumber seemed to speak, for it told only too eloquently the full story of my early happy and irresponsible days. As I sat there, gazing at those records of forgotten faces and discarded fashions, my heart was softened towards photography. The thought came, does there not lurk in some dark corner of every camera a good fairy who enchants every plate as it is exposed? True, from their very crudeness, many of the pictures were productive of a smile, but still an enchantment was there filling, after the lapse of years, each photograph with a curious grace. In spite of their coarseness and crudity of technique, one read into their unintelligent realism a virtue and a pathos such as is so often suggested by an old painting. When we look at an old picture or portrait it is hard not to think of him by whom it was painted, rather than of him who was portrayed. But, while the painter nearly always obtrudes himself on us in his work, few of us ever think about a photographer. Why? It is hard to say; possibly, because his work is done so quickly. And yet, that very rapidity of production makes every light picture which we call a photograph so real and, despite the conventionality and stiffness of the attitudes, so natural.

I picked up a particular group. How well I remember its being taken in the late seventies. It was in a college quad, and what a Babel of talk and laughter there had been, silenced only for a while as the artist said, "Now, gentlemen, just a moment," to burst forth again with double force when the camera had done its duty. There was I; even the suit I wore on the occasion came back to memory, and the ostentatious tie of which I then was so proud. Even the background had a sympathy all its own, for was it not the window of a certain room in which "old Shad" used to wax eloquent on the glories of the age of Pericles, or put our torpid brains through such mental gymnastics as explaining the subtle charms of anapests and iambics, or analysed for our benefit the wise sayings of Marcus Aurelius. What stories that window could tell. The long
R. H. Firth

procession of men who had gazed through its grimy panes. Men in whiskers and velveteens had given way gradually to men in morning coats and full trousers, and they again to those clean shaven and in dittoes or flannels. The very walls of the old familiar spot seemed to frown down in the picture on the kaleidoscopic pageant, the individuals composing which did and do not realize their transience.

Certainly not only this particular group, but all these old photographs were pregnant with an irony and a pathos. They were themselves as eloquent to me as the walls surrounding the places where they were taken. Then I scanned closely the faces and compared them with the nominal roll below. Some, were easy to recall, others less so. Then came the thought, where are they now, these leaves which the unsparing wind of Time has scattered? Doubtless, in the "book of fate," the name, address, the past and future of every one of them are duly entered. Whether for good or ill, that book of reference is not available to us, and one has to make up for its absence by studying those old groups and guessing the character of every member from his lineaments, bearing, and what one remembers of him. As I looked through the collection and tried to reconstruct some of the life-histories of the members, I came across but one who achieved any great fame. In a particular group dated 1877, there he sat a solemn, heavy looking young man, a future Empire builder and name-giver to a province of twice the size of France. Except the well-marked nose, there is no feature to distinguish him from any around him. But I, who know now all that fate was holding for him, could not but linger at the sight of the face of him as I knew it in years gone by. I recalled how quickly the laurel branch grew for him, how it flourished only to be cut off, tragically and untimely, when most of its leaves were still green. There, in the half-light, I sat and wondered, was it better to be, as they who were there portrayed in that group with him probably still are, healthy, happy, sane, stupid and obscure, or have led, like that young satrap, a short meteoric life of triumph and some tragedy. Reverently, I packed the old collection of photos away and asked myself which of the two lots would one rather draw? Which was the better or the luckier? I did not know; and perhaps it is as well that I should not know.

X.

A few days ago, I found myself in an advanced dressing station just when a batch of wounded men were brought in from the regimental aid posts. Some were badly injured and, with critical interest, I watched the medical officers and orderlies deal with them. As I rode back to headquarters, my thoughts wandered back to what I had just left and the idea occurred how indifferent I and the others had been. They and I had taken in every detail of the suffering, had undoubtedly felt a sympathy, but, for all that, those things were not going to interfere with our appetite, our
sleep, or our enjoyment of the scheme of the universe. All this indifference was not the outcome of callousness, and yet it was an asset which I could not avoid placing on the credit side of the incident. In his endless fight with pain, the doctor cannot afford to go unarmed, therefore he induces by will-power an armour which we call indifference. Without that armour, the blows to which sympathy exposes all who tend the sick and wounded would soon lay them low. It is a pretty problem, and my ride home was taken up mainly with trying to analyse that psychological secret which is the calm that pervades the mind of every doctor and nurse in the face of physical suffering. True, my analysis was largely negative, still I was forced to the conclusion that the indifference was not an effort to avoid, or the result of an incapability of thinking, but rather an effort made by thinking to avoid pain.

Some may attempt to explain indifference as a mere product of familiarity with certain experiences; it is doubtful whether this is sufficient, because certain mystics live in a state of mind which is well described as indifference, and yet that indifference is originally no product of experience. Moreover, each one of us cultivates more or less an intellectual and emotional indifference as to certain subjects upon which we are reluctant to think. Taking religion for instance; how many of us dare face the issues which such speculation raises? Many of us never enter that field of thought except in a drugged condition, and we seek indifference in conventional orthodoxy or conventional scepticism according to our environment, age and temperament. This and analogous cases are but examples of a genuine attempt to shirk all the pain and mental confusion which duty does not command us to endure. Then there is the indifference of the indulgent cynic—such, sufficiently cultivated, makes him a man powerless to help or punish and equally incapable of sympathy or indignation. The typical exponents of indifference are the would-be stoics. In them pride forbids influence by grief or pain, whether their own or that of another. This class of person poses as having strength of mind and thinks by suppressing all manifestations of feeling to master all emotion. Another form of indifference is engendered by sheer experience. It is best seen in the victim of ill-luck or the man who, having lived on hope for years, at the last abandons it and acquires indifference by sheer will-power. The services are full of men of this kind. They see Gazette after Gazette appear, and their fellows either promoted over their heads or made recipients of honours, often both. Many succeed by an effort of concentration to raise themselves to a plane above such banalities, some fail and never acquire that indifference which spells peace. The truth is, we need to take trouble and disappointment simply; if we admit our misery, Nature will console us by the remedy of Time. True, it is a remedy in which but few find faith, but in a suitable dose it does heal most of those who are not too proud to give in.