

Youth

Homer K. Gordon

Engr. '42

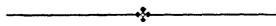
I WAS just starting to read *The Idea of Progress* by William Ralph Inge when I came upon a little quotation taken from the old Greeks: "What a race the golden sires have left—worse than their fathers, and your offspring will be baser still." The subject of the essay and its connection with this innocent quotation were immediately forgotten; for his statement inflamed anew a festering sore. It reminded me of a more recent quotation: "Modern youth is going to the dogs. This hackneyed statement is discussed pro and con in nearly every magazine. While one condemns the barbarity of the dances of youth, another "frankly" discusses chastity or lack of it among our young people, and still another "explains" the pitfalls that they will encounter. As one of these youths, I wish to enter my protest against this attempted destruction of our reputations—and more importantly the attempted destruction of our faith in ourselves.

My confidence in American youth is as solid as ever. Tonight I sit quietly in the protective shadow of a tree and watch the couples strolling across the moonlit campus. A merry laugh rings out and I turn to see a familiar figure. This afternoon he was sweeping floors and dusting classroom desks for twenty-five cents an hour. Breakfast is almost unknown to him. He says that he likes to sleep too well, but the truth is that every breakfast means an hour of sweeping floors. Here comes a group of students. In the center is the captain of the football team. Egotist? Perhaps, but yesterday I saw him play his last game for the school and go down in defeat. The tear that glistened in his eye as he shook hands with his teammates and trotted off the field, replaced by a substitute in the last quarter, revealed that sportsmanship we Americans are so proud of. On the outskirts of that little group is standing a quiet young man. He is an honor student in his class, but most of his time seems to be spent helping others. Another couple strolls by me. The girl—eyes shining, hair blowing freely in the breeze, a gay song on her lips—surely could have no serious thoughts of the

future. But why is she studying home management and care of children? Because she *does* have thoughts of the future. Not thoughts of a career in the business world, but of a home and children.

BEFORE me have passed young men and women who take trouble and hardship and defeat in their strides—with chins high and shoulders square; who live their lives not dreamily for tomorrow, not regretfully because of yesterday, but gladly and to the fullest extent for today. The shining brightness in each eye may be due to a hastily brushed aside tear, or the gay laugh may have pushed past a sob, but weakness of character is foreign to them. It is true that their watchword is fun, but who can condemn anyone who thinks that *life* is full of fun? that struggles are fun? that living in itself is a privilege to be enjoyed thoroughly?

What I have said does not necessarily explain the spirit of youth. I would rather believe that it is something that does not need explanation. For myself, I choose to withdraw into the smug circle of self-confident youth who seemingly spend their lives in gaiety; for I know that this gay manner is not a gaudy billboard that hides an ugly dump, but rather an innocent appearing camouflage for an impenetrable fortress, the fortress that is the birthright of every red-blooded American—courageous acceptance of defeat, but never lack of attempt; love of life, but not fear of death.



Dress Parade

Jean Spencer

H. Ec. '39

Suppose
We changed their garb
To overalls? Could men
Dressed thus excite our fickle minds
To war?