

**ESSAYS ON  
VOCATION.  
FIRST SERIES**

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Essays on Vocation. First Series by Basil Mathews

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**BASIL MATHEWS**

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# ESSAYS ON VOCATION

BY

H. WALFORD DAVIES	ARCHIBALD RAMAGE
SIR WILLIAM OSLER	EDWARD SHILLITO
J. LEWIS PATON	FANNY STREET
SIR ERNEST POLLOCK	W. H. SOMERVELL
AND EMILY E. WHIMSTER	

EDITED BY

BASIL MATHEWS

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## THE HUMAN SCENE

BY BASIL MATHEWS

'I can devote myself;  
I have a life to give,'

says Paracelsus with a characteristic blend of exaltation and responsibility.

There is, however, to-day for Paracelsus, who may stand as Browning's type of young life stepping into its place in the field, this added note: not only is his life the one life that he has to give; but he 'devotes himself' in an hour of world-change that is without peer in the story of man.

It is, for that reason, of crucial importance that he should get a just picture of the whole field in which his life-work is set. He may then find the true place for his play there. He can better appreciate at once the breadth of the world-game in which he is to pit his skill and strength against the opponents of his team, the strength and character of the contesting force, and the greatness of the goal.

If, with that in view, he stands on some ridge of contemplation to survey the human scene, the first effect will inevitably be one of bewilderment. The mind is baffled by the smoke and dust and the din of confused noises. This must be so in a world that has seen every foundation and buttress of its ordered life either shaken or actually shattered, and in which men everywhere find the old authority that ruled their lives either challenged or actually annihilated.

Gradually, however, through the turmoil of peoples, half frenzied and half dazed among the ruins of the old world, he begins to catch the drift of things.

In that drift the confusion itself is, in fact, the first dominant and for him the most significant fact. Contemplating the valleys at his feet and beyond them the vast and troubled continents, he sees peoples striking out half blindly and often wildly for new life. That turbulent medley of confused struggle stretches from the land on which he stands out eastward to the ultimate horizons of the world.

The soil at his feet, if he stands in England or Western Europe or America, presents the most nearly quiet spectacle that the world has to show. For it sustains a people who have not lost either the order of government to which they have been accustomed or for the most part the habit of obedience to laws that hold in unity the fabric of national life. Yet even here those uneasy and troubled disturbances of life that were quelled in 1914 by unity under a common peril, stir again in a more violent and, at the same time, in a more sustained way.

Labour is in rebellion; partly driven by a deep and enduring sense of injustice, partly called by a desire to break the existing economic order defiant of consequence, partly moved by a determination to secure command of commodities, yet dominantly stirred by the vision of a new social order. The best mind of labour everywhere is feeling round for a considered and unified policy. Meanwhile, the organized power of Trade Unionism is itself challenged by more violent and rebellious forces; and, by a curious irony, those very influences of reaction which before the War were plotting to weaken the power of the Trade Unions, now desire to increase their strength as a bulwark against the more furious and sinister onslaughts of extremist organizations.

He sees there at his feet also, subtler, but no less



pervasive or significant, forms of unrest and rebellion. Impatience with the moral sanctions that have obtained in relation to sex; scorn of or indifference to the spiritual leadership of the Church; that whole ferment of desire for what is called 'self-expression'; the will to exploit to the full the whole capacity for sensation which one's life can offer; all these are symptoms of a profound upheaval of the human spirit affecting every grade of young life in the western world.

Beyond the west, however, with its relatively stable Anglo-Saxon and Roman civilizations, lie vast ranges of life not simply in ferment but in revolution; not merely stirred up by rebellious agitation, but plunging through chaos to the verge of anarchy.

The soil of Central and Eastern Europe and of Asia is littered with the tremendous débris of the five last Empires; the German, the Austro-Hungarian, the Turkish, the Russian, and greatest of all, though most remote, the Chinese.<sup>1</sup> The old order of life is thus broken to fragments from the Pacific across Asia and Europe to the Baltic, the Adriatic, and the Aegean Seas. The merciless flails of hunger and cold drive Russia through a blizzard of suffering to the edge of the precipice of anarchy. The small nations that sat under the thrones of Berlin and Vienna stagger desperately out to seek freedom, but without an authoritative guide or a valid master-word. The peoples of Nearer Asia, between the Aegean and Persia, tormented and decimated under Turkish rule, are almost blinded with the dawn of a new hope, and yet are not sure whether the glow in the sky

<sup>1</sup> In the sense in which 'Empire' is used of these and all other past Empires, it is not an accurate word to use of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The one remaining Empire that in some ways conforms to the ancient type is paradoxically enough the most modern—Japan.

may not, by some mischance, be merely the threatening fires of a new hell. China, with her old ordered life shattered and the foundations of a new order still unalaid, has discovered no stable government, largely because she has not bred, on a large scale, a reliable, powerful, and disinterested leadership, and is in the grip of a smouldering civil war, so persistent as to seem to be almost endemic.

Yet, if we look at China alone, the most remote of all these peoples from the civilization of the West, we discover the greatest population in the world, a people with striking powers of endurance and constituting an inexhaustible reservoir of labour, with her ablest sons capable of a powerful leadership that is still largely undeveloped ; a country having mineral resources of incalculable value and variety, with practically every product needed for the support of the most advanced civilization, including, incidentally, enough coal of high quality to provide the whole world at its present rate of consumption for over a thousand years and, alongside the coal, vast and indeed incalculable stores of iron. This people which has already established its seven thousand miles of railway, its complete postal system, its ironworks whose products successfully compete with those of Pittsburg and Bethlehem, and its ramified wireless installation, is bound to take a large part in directing the destinies of the future. Yet, at present, China has not 'found' herself. She tosses rudderless and defenceless in the tempest of the world's unrest. 'Surely never richer freight went derelict on the waters of time.'

Looking across the human scene, then, as a whole, we see two vast and radically different ranges of human life.

On the one hand we have a half of the human race—well over seven hundred millions of people—dazed and bewildered amid the débris of those five Empires. From

Vladivostock to Vienna, and from Shanghai to Bagdad and Danzig the old order of controls is broken up, the social structure and the political direction are thrown into the crucible and melted down. The peoples look anxiously into the fiery furnaces, their eyes half blinded by the glare of the flames, to see what new shape will be drawn from the molten mass. Their spirits are in the main desperate and rebellious, where they are not merely despondent and cynically quiescent; yet their best life is thrilled, in spite of it all, with a flickering hope for the emergence of a new life of ordered freedom.

On the other hand we see that phenomenon, not new indeed as a fact in the world, but quite new in the significance and potency of its fresh life after the war, the English-speaking peoples. All that we mean when we say the United States of America, the British Isles, Newfoundland, Canada, Australia, and South Africa is there. But infinitely more lies behind.

To the English-speaking peoples has been given the strange and in fact the awful heritage of guiding the destinies of three hundred millions of people who are in India. There in that vast medley of races, tongues, and religions, ranging from the cultivated Hindu philosopher to the outcaste, and including the proud Rajput, the courageous Mahratta, the subtle Bengali, the quick Parsi, the fiery Sikh, the quiet millions upon millions of Dravidian village folk, lies the greatest responsibility that has ever been laid upon the shoulders of any Empire in the world's history. Britain cannot throw off that yoke. Divided as India is by caste and by creed, by her divergence of races and social life, and with a history that has been a record of the clash of all those parts, she had no political unity and no guarantee of peace save that given to her by Britain. Yet India's veins are tingling with the new wine of Eastern nationalism, and her qualities are such