

NO ONE can claim more than average competence in talking about students. Since every student is in himself a unique person, and because the differences between students are as great as the differences between persons in the world at large, there can be no such animal as an authority of student life. Students generally represent a fairly typical cross section of society, but with an added dash of intellectual curiosity and a sharper verve for living. When it comes to talking about today's students it's "each man to his own observation."

But one can be an observer, and the role of an observer is always an interesting one, for, you see, he has all the smug privileges of vicarious participation and assumes none of the responsibilities involved. When one sets himself to the task of evaluating the quality of campus life at a great university he discovers that his position on the periphery does not give him a good vantage point.

The observer must always be content with seeing only the fragmentary, the obvious and the near. Never can he explore the dynamics of student ways and feelings. About all he can do is confess that student life in general presents an ever-changing and mixed scene of colorful activity. The real meaning behind and beneath it all is known only to the student himself. Time alone will make it plain.

It is fascinating to watch the constant procession of postulants to the altar of wisdom. On arriving, some fail to bend the knee, others find the experience the beginning of a longer excursion into richer living. But all of them seem to grow and mature somehow in the process.

Those of us who work both on and off-campus in a university community are not unaware of our privilege in sharing some of these experiences of growth. We must acknowledge that the students help us far more than we ever help them. We frequently find that their loyalty to the pursuit of truth challenges our more-or-less fixed opinions and prejudices. We owe to them a great debt, and therefore find it difficult to give our impressions of campus life in terms other than sympathetic ones.

This youthful generation has been called a "silent generation," and not without some cause. Perhaps the word "silent" is considered apt because today's campus group is not as noisy as its predecessors on social issues. Whereas in the 'thirties, American campuses were alive with picketing and placard-carrying organizations, today's scene presents more reserve.

Undoubtedly there is as much genuine social sensitivity in the class of '55 as in

Fascinating to Watch

To obtain the viewpoint of a non-combatant in the academic struggle, the student editorial board asked a Norman minister to give, from his observations, a look at the O.U. students as a bystander views them.

By FINIS A. CRUTCHFIELD

the class of '35, but there is less excitement when the great social issues of the day are confronted. As related to world problems, the dominant mood of the hour suggests a neo-stoicism. However, the sense of courageous resignation simply does not wish to be sold a "bill of goods" on any issue, and students are not likely to commit themselves to elaborate social schemes and grandiose political and economic programs without adequate forethought. It's an encouraging sign.

Any minister would observe that the age-old deceptions of the young are yet with us. Some students feel that "all good people are gullible" and they yield the idea that one has to practice evil to know about it. Others sincerely confuse freedom and license; their struggle for the mastery of new principles in early adult life is actually the same as it has been in every generation.

On every campus there are small groups who discover that detachment is the mark of the intelligentsia, and oftentimes this discovery is carried to an extreme point of intellectual and moral cowardice.

Also moral relativism rears its head in university life as elsewhere. "Right and wrong are only what you think they are" is the devil's ancient chant. The assumption that one creates his own standards still entices some.

On the other hand the bystander observer should be impressed with the spirit of intellectual honesty among today's student group. In no field is this noted with more genuine rejoicing than in the field of religion. Happily, students are generally friendly to faith and the church. They abhor bigotry as though it were the plague and are reluctant to indulge in the pre-judgment of groups. They almost instinctively respond to the idea that naturalistic interpretations do not give satisfactory answers to the deeper problems of living.

This campus generation is also distinguished for its growing sense of vocational responsibility. Few are content to prepare for a meaningless future. And none approaches commencement without some strong and definite plans and hopes.

Matching this vocational seriousness is

a marked soberness in approaching marriage. The hasty marriage procedures of a generation ago are not typical of this age. Nearly every couple is willing to participate in sound study and guided preparation for married life. This is considered to be one of the most encouraging signs of all.

One other point should be noted—there is a new interest in the humanities. While no one in this highly technical world discredits the importance of know-how or efficient management and operation, there is a notable development of feeling that good living requires much intellectual synthesis and interpretation. And aesthetic interests are considered normal.

One of the most serious needs among today's students is the development of their critical faculties. (This is offered as a personal preachment.) Much of modern opinion is, of course, molded by the predigested and condensed words of commentators, columnists, and quick-quip artists. If to-

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Finis A. Crutchfield is minister to McFarlin Memorial Methodist Church, near the campus. He is universally respected by students for his ability to teach from the pulpit. He holds degrees from SMU, Duke, Oklahoma City University, and the University of Tulsa.

day's graduate is to take a responsible position in our society he must rapidly expand his ability to analyze and evaluate news and propaganda.

Perhaps the most singular need among this youthful generation is that of developing a healthy resistance to all forms of calculated and well-engineered propaganda. In the world of ideas as well as in the world of material things, salesmanship has become a formidable operation. Mass manias and bandwagon enthusiasms are skillfully and smoothly promoted so the student must learn not to be "taken in" by the subtle and suave approaches of current "experts and authorities."

In my dealings with university students on this campus I have concluded that in the main they can be trusted.

Intellectually they are above average; morally (who can judge another?) they are average at least.

They are sensitive to injustice, slaves to fashions in clothes, thoughtful in the presence of dear elderly ladies, retired scholars, and ministers.

I happen to like them and feel that if the future of the world were dependent on the quality of life found in most of O.U.'s seniors, one could not be pessimistic about the ultimate outcome of things.

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