

### THE MELTING POT

In the past few years an abbreviation that has been bandied about frequently is ISS. Now most of us know that I.S.S. stands for International Student Service, but I imagine that probably few of us know just what this organization is and what its aims are. According to its own handbook, I.S.S. is a world-wide organization of students, graduates, and faculty, with headquarters in Geneva. Its aims are threefold: to provide international contacts among universities, to promote international understanding, and to provide material help and moral aid for students. Every country which takes part in I.S.S. has a national committee which strives, by various means, to promote these three aims. Thus for the last three years the chief endeavors of the Canadian I.S.S. committee have been a D.P. scholarship plan and an International Summer Seminar, the second of which I should like to discuss. I shall deal with it now in a general manner and in a later article shall consider the topic (The Crisis in Western Culture) which was the theme of this year's Seminar.

The Summer Seminars have been financed by the Canadian Council for Reconstruction through U.N.E.S.C.O. In addition, the provincial governments of Canada have made grants to the I.S.S. to defray the travelling expenses of the Canadian delegates. The Seminar which I was privileged to attend as the representative of St. Dunstan's was the third to be held and took place at Pontigny, a French village about 120 miles south of Paris. There, amid the rural beauty of central France, we spent an unforgettable five weeks.

Now the word "seminar" means simply a group of students engaged in research. We were not this summer engaged in research of the ordinary kind, but I think one might say that we were doing research of a very special type—research in human nature. We were not there primarily for an academic or scholastic purpose. We did not even study—but we did learn. We got to know the thoughts and ideals of seventy students of sixteen other nationalities; four Finns, four Swedes, three Norwegians, six Danes, four Dutch, eight French, four British, nineteen Germans, three Italians, one Czech, two Yugoslavs, two from Pakistan, one from India, one from Kenya, one from Hawaii, and five Americans. But it was not only other nationalities with which we became acquainted. During this summer the



word "Canadian" came to mean something to us too. We learned many things about Canada and Canadians that we had not known before.

Our daily program at Pontigny began with two lectures in the morning, each of an hour's duration. In the afternoon we had organized discussions called seminars, which lasted an hour and a half. During this time our whole group was not together, for we split up into sections according to the subject of our choice. The topics for discussion in these seminars were chosen in advance by those taking part in them, and usually some of the members prepared short talks. The professors in charge of these groups took no part in the discussions, but merely acted as chairmen.

The staff at the Seminar consisted of eleven professors, ten of them Canadians and one an Englishman. In addition to our regular staff of teachers, we had five guest lecturers. The first was the Canadian ambassador, Mr. Vanier, who spoke on the value of such international affairs as ours. Then there was Dr. Brock Chisholm of Canada, now head of the World Health Organization, who said, among other things, that almost all of the world's ills can be traced to man's childhood frustrations. We had, too, Professor Ritter from Germany, who talked of education in his country, and Professor Jammes from the Sorbonne, who gave two lectures in French on the Marshall Plan. Finally, and most illustrious of all, was the great Thomistic philosopher, Etienne Gilson, who delivered two lectures on culture.

The European students were in general older than our group from the New World, and they were all studying at the graduate level. Indeed, one of the British delegates was a professor of engineering, and one of the Germans had a doctorate in philosophy. However, the difference in ages was no social barrier and all mixed freely. We had games and sports of all kinds, and discussions, usually of the unorganized variety, at all hours. In everything, we worked and played together.

In assessing the value of the Seminar, it must be looked at in the light of its intention, for as a program of study and research, it was unsuccessful, and as an attempt to solve the Crisis of Western Culture it was even more unsuccessful. But this was only an apparent failure, for it was not planned to achieve these ends. It was planned to create, for a few weeks, an international community, and in this,



as a project of international understanding, it was a great success. In spite of our varied backgrounds, and our even more varied beliefs, we found—in our games, in our lectures, and even in our sometimes heated discussions, in short, in our constant association—sympathy and goodwill and understanding.

A second great achievement was the opportunity for free discussion. We were told the very first day that the inspiration for the Seminar had been a sincere trust in the value of free and open discussion. It was recognized that all teaching is the responsibility of the student, and, therefore, the lecturers presented themselves, in the best Socratic tradition, merely as agitators stirring up discussion. Thus in an atmosphere where discussion was stressed almost to the saturation point we were lifted from our own narrow student viewpoint to an appreciation of the outlook of other students.

The Canadian Summer Seminar was, moreover, in effect if not in purpose, a great public relations project for Canada. The Europeans had an intense interest in Canada and we attempted to satisfy their desire for knowledge. The prominence of things Canadian at the Seminar gave them an opportunity of studying our country—an opportunity which they seized. Furthermore, our own Canadian national unity was advanced by the bonds of friendship forged between the French-speaking and English-speaking delegates during the summer.

Finally, the many personal benefits accruing from such an experience, especially the warm friendships which we made with students from various parts of the globe, were by no means negligible. The feeling of comradeship ran high and we associated constantly with others whose very thoughts were a revelation to us. No longer are the European nations mere impersonal land masses to the fifty Canadians who were at the Seminar; now they are groups of people, human beings like ourselves. I feel that the Summer Seminar was of incalculable benefit to ourselves, to our countries, and to the cause of world peace.

—MARK MacGUIGAN '51

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The vocation of every man and woman is to serve other people.—Tolstoi.