CHAPTER XIII

Certain Qualifications

Nothing more stimulates a country like ours than the emergence from the mass of us of a man who arouses us to say, "Keep your eye on him. He looks like a leader." It is like watching an unknown ship come out of the fog into the full light of sunshine where she can be examined, rated, approved - or disapproved. There is no doubt that Owen D. Young in the last ten years has become a leader of a type new in our industry, one who breaks away from all the accepted patterns for Big Business heads.

Perhaps the most significant difference between him and his predecessor is his outlook on industry. He seems to regard it as an institution with social, moral and political relations and to insist that its economics be adjusted to these relations. Invariably when he attempts to interpret this or that angle of our industrial or financial mechanism he harks back to human beings. He sees bank rates, radio broadcasting, electric currents, in terms of men, women and children. Mr. Young comes close to defining industry as Abraham Lincoln did Democratic Government - a mechanism "of the people, by the people, for the people."

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It makes an innovator of him - scares many both in and out of industry. "Too radical," is the commonest detrimental criticism I have heard of him in discussion of his fitness for the presidency. Such objections come usually from business men. They deplore his frank speech. To hear one of themselves admiting the possibility under any conditions of government ownership of anything sends chills down their backs!

His outspoken candor disturbs at times some of his warmest admirers. It did in the matter of the bonus. He was reluctant to speak at all as I have pointed out, begged off; but when he ~~must~~ ~~needs~~ felt his obligation as a citizen to appear as requested before the Congressional committee, he felt equally the obligation to declare his best thought on the subject - which he did, to the consternation of not a few of his friends in banking and political circles. They insist he rocks the boat - a dangerous practice. What it amounts to is that he can not be relied upon to go along with the powerful majority. He uses his mind freely, surely a fearsome thing!

But while they may grumble they do not cut him off, indeed often cry hungrily for his aid in difficult problems; that is, however much they dread his domination they dare not dispense with him.

It is not impossible that Mr. Young may rock the boat sometimes unnecessarily. I don't agree myself that he did it in

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the case of the bonus. His opinion was sound. The difficulty was in the failure of the operating bureau to do the sifting of needy veterans from not needy. "But he should have known they'd never take the trouble," I have heard critics say. But is a man to withhold wise counsel because he knows it will not on the instant be accepted? If so we would soon hear no more wisdom. Even if the criticisms of his frank speaking, his radical thinking, may at times be justified, small is the defect of a great and much needed quality.

While on one hand you hear complaints of his radicalism, on the other certain of his critics censure what they call his conservatism. They sneer at a labor policy which encourages men to work with the employers. No matter if, as in Mr. Young's case, trade unions are protected, and he numbers among his friends many trade union leaders, he believes in a company union and therefore must be, "an enemy of the working man!"

I have been impressed in listening to Mr. Young talk of radicalism and conservatism, socialism and communism, that he was vastly more liberal towards all such schools of thought than are their different spokesmen; if put to it he could state the case of each as well if not better than could this partisan or that. He does not close his mind to ideas with which he does not agree. The only spokesman to whom he will not listen is the one who calling himself a liberal does refuse to listen to others.

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There is a sort of detraction, at least of dissatisfaction born of the limits set on personal contacts by Mr. Young's steady upward climb. Each new level he has reached has brought him a new set of associates and friends and inevitably cut him off to some degree from old ties.

"We don't see so much of him here as we wish we did," the Schenectady test boy said to me rather wistfully. And the same day an officer of the company said practically the same thing. "We need him and feel the need." This is the price a man's friends pay when he moves up. They may, and in Mr. Young's case do insist that he never changes - is "just the same" when he does turn up. Nevertheless there is regret, a sense of loss, possibly in a few, a kind of resentment, of jealousy. "He belonged to us and he has left us."

There are few men who having left such a succession of pasts behind them as has Mr. Young, are so loyal to and interested in the whole chain as is he. For almost before anything else Owen Young is loyal. Perhaps first of all loyal to the country side from whence he sprung and which he still calls home - loyal to its soil, its activities, the people. Wealth has only intensified his fidelity to the place. He uses money there not to separate himself from those who made and carry on its life, but to add to their opportunities, interests. He builds no estate which cuts him off from them, but a community which brings

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him and them together.

This loyalty comes out likewise in his relation to his college. He is no mere rich alumnus giving gifts - though he gives many. He is part and parcel of the college life, present and future, wrestling with the problems - a feature of its campus. "He fits in," a keen-eyed, not easily deceived undergraduate of this generation told me, and the phrase is eloquent of the quality of Mr. Young's devotion.

But with his birth-place and his college, as well as various other interests which he serves there may be a question whether his affection does not lead him into doing too much for them, does not encourage them to wait on his decisions, throw on him responsibilities they ought to discharge, expect him to help them out of all their tight places. I have felt this in various relations - too much dependence on Mr. Young. If things go right his is the glory, but if things go wrong his is the fault - not theirs who must administer what he plans, advises. It should be said, too, that responsibility is sometimes unfairly thrust on him by those who have urged him on to a committee, a board, promising that they will do all the work, and that they ask only the help of his name and then leave him to assume the burden or see what he considers a worthy undertaking weaken or die.

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The most frequent complaint of Mr. Young I have heard is that dispite his notable genius for developing helpers he still takes on too great a variety of work. This is the mistake a man of his nature almost invariably makes. He is interested in all sorts of things and all sorts of people. He likes problems, his own and other peoples. He is generous of time, money, counsel. It gives him pleasure to see people, do what they ask him to do, and, perhaps first of all, he has a large, active, always-on-the-job sense of duty. It doesn't let him off easily. The obligations of a man to his family, friends, profession and the public must be discharged. That is basic with him.

When he came back from the making of the Young Plan his friends insisted he was worn to a frazzle, though he laughed at their concern. A man of the Big Business world said to him, "Why do you do these unnecessary things? These months in Paris have cost you a pretty penny." (Uncle Abe never could get over the fact that "Owen paid his own hotel bills over there, killing himself for those foreigners") "You get more abuse than praise and besides you know you haven't settled the thing. I call it foolish!"

I don't know what Mr. Young answered the gentleman, but he might very well have replied in the temms of his introduction of Melvin Traylor at a dinner given in April 1930 in recognigion of Mr. Traylor's services in organizing for the Bank for

International Settlements.

"I do not like - I never did like - a boy who would not play with the other boys for fear of getting his pants dirty, and that is why I like Melvin Traylor. I never did like a business or profession which failed to recognize its duties to serve the public honestly and zealously; and that is why I like Melvin Traylor, - because he was always finding ways in which his business could widen its usefulness to the community and the nation. I never did like a man whose heart was cold to the needs of his community and his fellow men; and that is why I like Melvin Traylor.

"And, finally, I never did like an American who went to Europe apologetically, nor one who felt that he could best serve his country by ignoring the problems of others. Melvin Traylor went to Europe to tackle a difficult job, determined to succeed, in the interest of all. He did. And so I have great pleasure in presenting him to you tonight."

Enjoyment of human beings accounts for part of the pressure upon him. He is most catholic when it comes to men. Catholicity takes time. He is generous, wants to help where he can. He really likes to do what people want him to do and he has an inveterate habit of doing everything really essential himself.

A gentleman introducing him once at a dinner told a

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story which is pertinent. It was of something overheard in war times in a Pullman smoking room:- a man fresh from an actual experience with a submarine was talking with a sheepman from Montana, the sheepman confided that he was on his way to Washington to tell the Navy how to put an end to the submarine nuisance. If the train wasn't late the government would be in a position to stop it by noon.

An interested and curious porter asked the narrator as the train pulled in and the sheepman hurried to the Navy Department, "Suh , is that gen'lman gonna send somebody to wipe out the subarmines, or is he gonna go hisself?"

Mr. Young goes "hisself" - too often in the judgment of some of his associates.

All of this means crowded days for Mr. Young, anxious ones for his staff. One wonders how in the world he can get so much done. I determined to find out for myself and unbeknown to him spent several days in the offices of his staff building up a typical day, one that fairly represented the variety of his daily activities, the daily demands on his attention. I think now that I can say with conviction that Mr. Young is one of the best organized men in the world. There is no machinery; it is all very human and unobtrusive. But the organization is effective, nevertheless. In a previous chapter I have sketched its make-up.

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Let us suppose it is Monday morning. Perhaps Mr. Young has spent the week end at Van Hornesville, giving Saturday to looking over the herds and going over the farm with his Manager. Coming down Sunday afternoon he was probably met at Albany by his secretary, who was to tell him about Saturday's telephone calls and correspondence and then perhaps clean up the mail. Then he will spend the evening giving his family a slow humorous narrative of all the Van Hornesville gossip. On Monday, knowing what awaits him when the week's work actually begins, he will not come to his office much before his first appointment. His mail, all of which he sees, and the clippings from the press, which he carefully reads, are awaiting him on his desk. Perhaps he is working on the re-organization of a bank. His Assistant goes in to report that X and Y are willing to go along with the program, but that Z is unable to do so. Mr. A dnd Mr. B have been suggested to head up the institution and their qualifications are such and such. Mr. C and Mr. D are very anxious to have an appointment to discuss the matter. Mr. M is sailing for Europe tonight and is most anxious to see him before he goes.

His Secretary is waiting with a list of a dozen or more people who must see Mr. Young that day. The Ambassador from ------ has an urgent message which he is most anxious to deliver to Mr. Young in person. Messrs. E, F, and G of the -------

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Utilities Company must see him at once, because they are faced with a difficult situation. The ------ Company is resisting the only fair course of action, can't they be made to see that in the long run it is in their interest to comply? With a sympathetic comprehension of both view-points Mr. Young explains to each the position of the other. The chances are that neither party had very well understood the problems of the other, and here is new light on the situation. Now knowing the factors involved they go to work afresh and perhaps they work out a solution. Not improbably, however, they have encountered a new problem by Wednesday in which they want Mr. Young's help.

Meanwhile the list of appointments continues. The President of one of the leading universities is in town for the day and seeks Mr. Young's advice. His problems may be financial; they may be educational; they may be both. The president of the Radio Corporation telephones that he has a matter that he would like to discuss with Mr. Young at luncheon. Mr. Young is not free for luncheon because there is the weekly meeting of the Executive Committee of the Federal Reserve Bank, which commences with luncheon. He does not know how long it will last, but he will be glad to see Mr. Sarnoff as soon as he gets back.

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The morning passes. Mr. ¶, a labor man, is on the phone - will Mr. Young speak to him? The answer is yes. Mr. ¶ has learned that the ------ Company is threatening to lay off some of its men. He knows that they have no connection with the General Electric Company, but thought that maybe Mr. Young could give him helpful advice. Perhaps Mr. Young knows some of the difficulties which that company is facing, which he explains. He is not optimistic, but nevertheless he will help --- It is one o'clock, he is due at the Bank in fifteen minutes, and his Assistant comes in to go over the program of the meeting of the Advisory Council of the National Broadcasting Company which is scheduled to take place on the following day. Mr. Young approves of items A, B, C, and D and asks him whether he had thought about E. He had not, and goes off to think about it-----

Mr. Young rings for his secretary. There has been no opportunity of dealing with his mail. There is time now for only one or two letters. The mail includes letters from half a dozen captains of industry, three or four financiers, one or two lawyers, a dozen people with ready-made schemes to save the country, three or four invitations to speak, a dozen appeals for contributions. These appeals come in in such quantities during the year that if a man took time to respond to all his funds must needs be tremendous or quickly exhausted; and if he had inexaustible funds he would have the time for nothing else.

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Mr. Young looks through them carefully, pausing to chuckle over a letter from the manager of his farm announcing that Van Horne Aggie Wilhelmina has just broken all records and given 116 pounds of milk the day he left, making a total of 3,120 pounds for thirty days. "That's a real business," he says to his secretary, "no curtailing of production there!" He had picked that cow himself some months before as the most promising of the lot. He had spent much of his week end at Van Hornesville going over the farm situation. "The price of milk is a real problem to the farmers up there," he says, "and we've got some problems to work out. Why don't you keep my calendar clear down here so that I can pay more attention to these basic things?" His secretary laughs, but is not to be diverted. "You wanted to write today to Mr. R. President of the ------Company, Mr. Young; and do you want me to send a telegram to Dr. Sykes at St. Lawrence?"

It is nearly 3:30 when Mr. Young calls from the Federal Reserve Bank, where he is Deputy Chairman of the Board, to say that he is going to stop a moment at the office of the president of the ------ Bank. If the San Francisco call comes in he expects to be back in his office after 4 o'clock. Yes, he will see Mr. Sarnoff if he wants to come down at Four. His secretary reports that Mr. Swope is anxious to see him; also that a friend

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of one of his former associates is out of a job and would appreciate his help. Mr. Swope will be busy after 4:30 until six. Mr. Young says he will go to his office at six and perhaps they can ride up town together.

And so it goes. His staff has attempted during the day to deal with the mail so far as possible, but an irreducible minimum remains for him to consider, himself. Most of it will have to wait, unless he "cleans it up" after he goes home. During the day his Assistant and secretaries have been busy seeing people who have wanted to see him, and trying to be helpful to them or tell them whom they ought to see in the organization. There remain several things which they must report to Mr. Young and get his decision on. It is not difficult to see why, during a succession of such "typical days" his decisions are sometimes slightly delayed.

As he is leaving for the day his secretary will remind him of his first appointment for the morning. "Do you believe that the meeting of the General Education Board will be finished in time to permit you to attend the luncheon which Mr. T is giving for Mr. S? Oh, Mr. Young - just one thing more. The ----- Press called up to ask if you had any statement to make in connection with Chancellor Bruening's declaration that Germany would be unable to pay any more reparations of any sort. No statements on any subject? All right, Mr. Young, thank you -----

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Good night." And then the exhausted Assistant and secretaries line things up for the next day - just as typical and just as exacting.

It is easy to understand how hard pressed friends or associates anxious for Mr. Young's advice - wanting it quickly - feel when they can not get appointments, that they are neglected for "outside interests;" or when they do reach him and are told, "Well, I will have to think about it," concludes his mind is too burdened to handle their problems. It is a question, however, if Mr. Young should be expected to give prompt answers to any problem troubling an associate. It is not his business, if I understand his position. An industry must have an operating head whose function is something like the traffic policeman who stands at a busy corner crying, "Go, Stop, Go, Stop, Right, Left," interjecting now and then orders to take a pedestrian, a chauffeur, a truck driver to the station house. His business is to keep the traffic moving. The General Electric has one of the ablest operating heads in the country, one with astonishing power of making swift and sure decisions, Gerard Swope. Mr. Swope operaties in the field of the definite, though by no means exclusively, witness the Swope Plan, Mr. Young largely in the field of the indefinite. His business is policies and trends. Hurry your thinking on policies and trends and you may ditch the whole industry!

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But admit this and you must also admit that it is hard on his associates who must get things done, who hesitate to act without adding to their own judgment the weight of his.

"I never do anything without asking myself what Mr. Young would do about it," said a responsible head in one corporation where he is a powerful factor. Fine! But too many of them not only wonder what Mr. Young would do, but they want to hear it from his lips. That is, they are still unweaned. Though all the evidence seems to show that Mr. Young does his best to force those he puts into responsible positions to go on their own, they miss too much his stimulating direction not to fight for it, not to feel hurt or despondent or resentful when they fail to get at once what they are after. They fear, too, no little, I suspect, his disapproval. "If a man falls short of what is expected of him," I have been told by one placed to know, "he is made quickly but uncomfortably aware of it and that is all."

This brings me to a point which has perplexed me no little - his uniform gentleness, his consideration, for the "other fellow," his mastery of the principles of friendly negotiation - all insisted upon by his friends - made me ask myself if this man was an undiluted fountain of human kindness - no iron in him. If this was true, as they all seemed to believe, then my intuition had failed me, for my first interview with Mr. Young had left me

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with the feeling that he had a very rigid backbone. But no one could or would give me proof of it. I put the point to one of his intimate friends, one who has been with him in great struggles.

"The man you picture," I said, "is all accomodation, consideration. Very fine, but where's the steel? Is there none?"

A wry little smile flitted across his lips. "Owen Young," he answered, "has the most terrible wollop of any man I know."

"But prove it," I insisted.

He thought awhile. "No, I don't think I could do that. But is it not true that the man who is able to make all of those who work with him feel that he has a terrible wollop, feel it so strongly that they will not give him a chance to use it, isn't it plain he has more steel in him than one who has to knock you down in order to prove that he is strong?"

"Considerate? Yes. The most considerate man I have known in my long experience," another man told me. "But of all the men I have known he is the one in whose way I would at least like to get."

There is more. If Mr. Young is the last man in the world to withdraw trust when he has once given it there is a complete and final withdrawal when he is convinced that a man is not what he hoped or believed.

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"When Owen is done with anybody he is done. He never says anything about it, but it is all over. He is like his father in that." This was his mother's judgment.

That is, the kindly gentleman of Van Hornesville is no easy mark. He is in fact a little terrifying to simple minds, but simple minds if straight need have no fear of Owen Young.

But to return to the crowded daily schedule and the charge that it not only interferes with duties closer at home, but wears him out. Ask Mr. Young about it and he will tell you how he gets his rest, recreation, through this multitude of activities.

In June 1931 at the end of the all-day Van Hornesville's celebration of the first Commencement of its new school I sought such light. I had watched him from ten o'clock in the morning when he first appeared on the street to six o'clock in the evening when I left the village. He had greeted literally hundreds of friends and neighbors; he had issued a statement commending President Hoover's moratorium, out that morning; he had entertained Governor Roosevelt and his suite at lunch; presided at the Exercises where the Governor spoke; had spoken himself and presented the diplomas; had had an eye for everything, the Van Hornesville band, the procession, the visiting movie caravans; had listened to scores wanting "just a word," and when I said good-bye was still receiving on the lawn, where so often Mother Young had watched Van Hornesville celebrating. "How Mother would have enjoyed this," he said. Mother Young had been gone only a few weeks.

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"I am afraid you are very tired," I said. He resented the very suggestion - "This is the way I rest," he replied.

Now what is there in it? Everything I believe. There is rarely if ever a time when the man is not carrying a problem for which no formula has yet been devised. For the solution of such a problem he depends much less on reason than on intuition, has much more faith in something that "comes to him" than in conscious argument.

But intuitions are sensitive things and shy. They must have a chance to gather, cannot be hurried or worried. One who knows this and has the regard for them that Mr. Young has, waits ~~and~~ To insure quiet to this inner place of his mind where intuitions breed he keeps his conscious mind, the active restless, busy-body part of the mind, engaged. He keeps it occupied with all sorts of things which interest him, concern others, things in which he takes pleasure and from which he gathers all sorts of information about the way things are going in the world, all sides of the world - economic, educational, social, political - ~~and he~~ gets too low-brow as well as high-brow, angles on things! But all this time be sure he is not forgetful of the problem he has put up to his intuitions. In quiet hours he takes it out and looks it over, talks it over endlessly with the one on whose judgment I surmise he leans most heavily - Mrs. Young, goes off with it tramping the Van Hornesville hill, and then one day gets

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his answer.

Here then is a strictly non-technical explanation of the way Mr. Young seems to me to get rest from his varied activities.

I suspect him too of using some of his personal diversions, Van Hornesville particularly, in diverting as well the attention of visitors who have become too insistent, curious or boresome on subjects of which he for one reason or another does not care to talk. He pulls out a picture of the Van Hornesville School, of Van Horne Aggie Wilhelmina, or tells you a Van Hornesville parable, and before you know it you are out with a flattered sense of having been admitted almost into the family, but without a word on the grave matter you called to discuss. That is, these varied interest of Mr. Young are used occasionally at least for protective coloration.

I am inclined to think myself that Owen Young's chief contributions to public life come from the free way he uses his mind, coupled as it is with his firm hold on social and ethical principles. But his mental excursiveness is certainly a bewilderment to many of his colleagues and so naturally are certain opinions and forecasts born of it.

The industrial or financial boards on which he sits, and there are many of them, are virile bodies usually made up of men of importance. There are always among them no doubt men

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of little imagination, more intent on the day and its events than future trends, some of them probably are suspicious of contacts outside of the nation or outside of the field in which they operate. Their attack is technical, practical, and they are more or less suspicious of that which has not been proved, reduced to tangible terms. Mr. Young worries them; he is too idealistic, they say.

"He is too optimistic, sees too big. We haven't the men yet ready to handle the undertakings of which Owen Young talks." This significant comment came rather reluctantly from a staunch friend and admirer. "The Youngs and Swopes are rare. They can be trusted because they have trained brains and see that what they undertake is good for everybody, are more concerned with human welfare than with what is ordinarily called business success. In their minds it isn't success unless it contributes increasingly to human welfare, but there are only a few such and there must be many if we are to learn the larger national and international combinations Mr. Young foresees. Also the government must have a type of men as big to do the regulating, and so far it has frightfully failed to find them. Owen Young has more confidence in human capacity than I have, he has more patience with those who fail to measure up to their responsibilities."

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Whatever there is in this reservation it is certain that no public man of our day, inside or outside industry, is doing more to emphasize the necessity of training men intellectually and socially as well as technically for life. The list of qualifications he puts up to youth, ambitious to play a part in the world, are much more searching, much nearer the mark, than any similar list to which my attention has been called.

But whenever I have come on this criticism of too great idealism, too great optimism, there has always gone with it something like the following from one who has long served with him on an important Board:-

"He has a mind as clear as crystal, no angles which distort his thinking. He functions at a hundred percent and knows how so to delegate work as to make out of his one hundred percent, too hundred. He deals with people as folks and I have never seen him fretted or angered. Yet if he has made up his mind that it is his duty to do a thing he is adamant."

It is possible, even probable, that their convictions of his general soundness silences often any questioning of his complete wisdom which may rise in the minds of friends and associates. His record, prestige, persuasiveness, give him the benefit of the doubt if one arises in their minds. But when affairs are shaken to the bottom as in the present period of depression and every enterprise with which Mr. Young is connected is suffering

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and must continue to suffer until the world rights itself. Those who have followed blindly ask, "Why did he not save us from this? He is no magician then as we thought," and they may blame him for not being all-powerful!

One thing is certain. All through this period in which Mr. Young and his enterprises have been suffering he has never blamed any man, institution or party. In his judgment we are suffering because our financial and economic set-ups are out of date. "Upon an old model economic machine we have loaded undreamed of requirements and responsibilities," he told the bankers in Paris in June 1929 before the break-down which started the depression. The longer the depression lasts the more weight his warning takes on.

But there is no final balancing of this man. For one reason the returns are not all in. He is only fifty-seven. One safe conclusion, however, is that Owen Young is not as simple as he looks, any more than Van Hornesville is as simple as it looks!

Coming to the end of the path I have been following I realize that something has eluded me. The farmer, lawyer, business organizer, negotiator, are all there, each highly developed, each with distinguished exhibits. Most impressive, too, is the way each supplements the other to make a whole.

More important than anything he has done, too, is the man he is - highly developed mentally, emotionally, socially -

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a man able to make thoughtful decisions and to take the responsibility of them - a trustworthy man, tolerant, watchful lest he be trapped by success into destroying himself.

Of all this I am convinced, but that is not all of the man. Possibly what tantalizes me is a fairly strong conviction that Owen Young has not yet tapped the full potentialities of his mind and spirit and that I am curious to know how much more there is to him and where and how he will demonstrate it.

Given life he will grow, that is sure, for possibly the most important thing about him is his faith in growth for himself and for all he undertakes, his patience in waiting on it.

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