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*F.C.—A Recollection*

By SYDNEY A. MAYERS

THERE WE sat, the two of us, just about twenty-five years ago, in his drab little office in the run-down old building on East Twenty-Ninth Street. An aromatic two-for-a-quarter cigar jutted rakishly from one side of his mouth. The top of his desk was decorated with an unkempt miscellany of books, notes, manuscripts, galley-proofs, and stubby pencils. There was an ashtray, too, which he disdainfully ignored; it was filled with dottle, and from its rim extended the stems of a half-dozen pipes, like so many oars at rest. His manner was gruff, but kindly, as he gave his full attention to what I was saying. Slowly his lips curled into a soft smile—a rather wry grimace, part amusement and part sympathy.

Then he spoke. "Truth," he said, "is like mumps or measles. A lot of people are immune. All you can do is expose them to it. If they 'catch' it, that's fine; but if they don't, it isn't your fault. Truth can't be taught—it must be learned. And learning requires a built-in capacity for education, a capacity that very few possess."

I listened intently to Frank Chodorov, gleaning from his words my first inkling of the theory of the Educable Elite. He was then the Director of the Henry George School, and I a neophyte teacher, struggling to impart to a class of confused students the essence of George's philosophy of economic freedom. In a fit of disgruntlement, I had dropped in to see "the Boss," somewhat petulantly demanding to know why I could not more successfully communicate the great message I was so eager to deliver. Bitterly I castigated myself for my evident shortcomings as an instructor, and concluded my diatribe with a melodramatic recommendation that I be forthwith removed from the faculty of the school.

I am sure Frank had heard the same tale of woe many times before. He, himself, must have repeatedly experienced the frustration of having every effort to propound a magnificent idea result in utter incomprehension. Nonetheless, he patiently explained the need to carry on, and

gently suggested I keep trying, casually adding that the school did not want to lose "a good teacher." (Years later, when I remembered his words, I realized the compliment I had received. I still treasure that accolade.)

Although, in retrospect, I am astonished at the naivete I displayed that evening, I am glad I yielded so readily to the impetuous urge to discuss my pedagogical problems. It was my first intimate meeting with one who was to become a mentor, an inspiration, and (best of all) a friend. I shall not forget the occasion; it was my introduction to a great man—a great man who would have scoffed and snorted at such an appellation. But I feel neither embarrassed nor diffident in attaching the label to Frank Chodorov; it is a cloak that fits.

For Frank, the years that followed were, if I may plagiarize a phrase from Dickens, "the best of times and the worst of times." As a matter of principle, he abhorred war, and a country embroiled in a world conflict was not a comfortable place for a vehemently outspoken "pacifist." Fervent individualist that he was, and always remained, he would not compromise, regardless of the opprobrium he was subjected to because of his stand. War, he thundered, is evil—all war, any war, every war! Yet I poignantly recall how, throughout World War II, when my accoutrement was that of the Army Air Corps, he cheerfully corresponded with me, ever concerned with my well-being; deeply interested in my martial adventures (and my reactions thereto). Notwithstanding his personal principles regarding militarism, never was there in his attitude the minutest hint of criticism toward my having elected to don a uniform.

Still, as I have said, those bitter days also were in a way "the best of times," for it was then that Frank conceived and began to publish *analysis*, his unique journal of Chodorovian comment, whose pages sparkled with deftly written wit and wisdom. *analysis* was his forum, his stage, his pulpit; it became his *raison d'être*. Not merely a way of life, it was life itself for this articulate ide-

alist, who stood on his own feet—and let no one else step on them.

At the same time, there gathered around him a devoted group of . . . I do not quite know what to call them, even though I later joined them. We were a curiously disorganized and amorphous aggregation, neither "followers," "disciples," nor "apostles." We listened to him, to be sure; but then we discussed, we argued, we disagreed—while Frank (at once benign and saturnine) goaded us with incisive questions and devastating rebuttals. I daresay, aside from a wonderfully congenial *camaraderie*, there were two ties that held us together: a profound regard for the integrity of the individual, and the warm affection we all felt for Frank Chodorov. Those "good old days" were good indeed.

Now, sadly aware that Frank has left us, I look backward gratefully over the past four years, when he served on the editorial board of FRAGMENTS, of which he had been one of the founders. Though his health was already frail, his indomitable spirit never weakened and his wit remained keen, constantly inspiring his fellow editors in their journalistic endeavors. Almost to the very end, as the shadows slowly enveloped him, he maintained an alert concern for FRAGMENTS, and we who continue its publication are proud and happy that he has been a part of it, and that it gave him joy. I like to think that he will always be a part of our paper, and that as long as these pages are printed, they will reflect the touch of Frank Chodorov.

Bill Buckley said of Frank that he had a "gentle yet obdurate way." To this apt and discerning observation, I would add a further note, applying to him the comment made by Eric Partridge about H. L. Mencken: that he was "compact of honesty and honor, and of an immaculate integrity." During life, Frank Chodorov was a robustly vigorous proponent of his principles, and a forthright seeker of truth. As far as those who knew him and loved him are concerned, he still is—because his vital spirit is still with us, and will continue to prevail.