WILLIAMS COLLEGE

INDUCTION OF PRESIDENT BAXTER

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The President's Address

It is twenty-three years since I delivered on this platform the valedictory address at the graduation of the Class of 1914. None of us then present realized that we were on the eve of a world war, whose consequences would shape our lives and, as it now seems likely, the lives of our children, and our children's children. One of our teachers, now dead, a man of whom I never think without respect and affection, had been stressing throughout the second semester the unlikelihood of a European conflict. President Wilson's first Congress, perhaps the most fruitful in constructive legislation of all Congresses since the first of George Washington, had recently passed some important measures including the Federal Reserve Act, though the new banking system did not come into effect until some time after the outbreak of the war. A reform administration was in quest of the New Freedom, and business was bad. We who were leaving this Berkshire valley perceived that we were about to enter a world of more rapid change. We were still ignorant, however, of the lengths to which that acceleration would go.

Those who look on the world from college windows tend to contrast the restless confusion of the world outside with the relative calm within. Franklin Carter, for example, when he was inducted into the presidency of Williams in 1881, spoke of "an age of hurry and whirling changes." Yet surely at no other period of man's history has the rate of social change been so fast as in the last quarter century. A war which many economists predicted could not be financed for a year lasted four, speeded invention, transformed institutions, toppled thrones, and changed the face of Europe.

The end of the war, moreover, brought no retardation in the rate of change. Some storms are so prolonged and so intense that, for days after the wind ceases to blow, seas run high. The Great War ended so long ago that few of our present undergraduates can remember it, even dimly. Yet the seas still rage and ships of state are driven hither and yon, at times as if they no longer minded the helm. Of late, moreover, the wind has been rising, steadily, ominously. Insecurity has become the greatest characteristic of the modern world.

Who in 1914 anticipated the strains to which the capitalist system has since been subjected, the changes in the nature of international trade, the widespread repudiation of government debts, the collapse for a time of our financial and industrial system? Who foresaw the challenge to democracy and the rise of the totalitarian state? Democracy and capitalism, the twin pillars of Nineteenth Century Liberalism, are now everywhere assaulted and undermined, and in several countries overthrown. Confronted with such dangers, conservative leaders have shown too often a blind opposition to change, or else an equally reckless attempt to outbid the radicals, or what may be more dangerous than either of those extreme courses, an inability to agree on any program whatever.

Insecurity has characterized all previous post-war periods, but never to as great a degree as today. Who of us believed in 1917, when the United States entered a "war to end war," that twenty years later peace would seem as precarious as it does today, and that a poorer world would be carrying twice as heavy a burden of armament as that under which it staggered in 1914? Today, when peace is undermined by economic nationalism and threatened by the vaulting ambition of fascist leaders both in Europe and the Orient, we are witnessing the collapse of the world's system of collective security. Our own country, after too hasty a reading of the lessons of the years 1914 to 1917, has placed on the statute book a new system of neutrality which, in the opinion of many careful students, is more likely to involve us in war than our old system. While Congress fumbled with the economic aspects of neutrality, without mastering them, too little attention has been paid to the risks of emotional involvement in war. We have heard much about British propaganda in the United States but no adequate study has yet been made of the volunteer unpaid efforts of thousands of Americans to conduct "pro-ally" propaganda themselves. If the next war brings democracies to grips with fascist states, the risks of emotional involvement will be still greater than they were twenty years ago. Must the United States be drawn into another World War before her people learn the lesson that the best way to avoid being involved in such a struggle is to help prevent it from beginning?

If we are swept into war we may expect an acceleration of the rate of change comparable to that which we experienced in and after 1917. If, on the other hand, we escape from hostilities, the problems of peace-time change will still be with us. Invention, the greatest general cause of change, will undoubtedly continue. Even if it should slacken or cease many important recent inventions would not, thanks to the time lag, reach their maximum effect on social conditions until many years from now. As it happens, the number of inventions, far from showing a tendency to diminish, is on the increase. As President Hoover's Research Committee on Social Trends pointed out in 1932:

> "Not all parts of our organization are changing at the same speed, or at the same time. Some are rapidly moving forward and others are lagging. These unequal rates of change in economic life, in government, in education, in science and religion make zones of danger and points of tension . . . . Scientific discoveries and inventions instigate changes first in the economic organization and social habits which are most closely associated with them . . . . The next set of changes occurs in organizations one step further removed, namely, in institutions such as the family, the government, the schools and the churches. Somewhat later as a rule come changes in social philosophies and codes of behavior."

Test these theories out for yourself by tracing the history of any one of six great inventions which have exerted so much influence on American society in the twentieth century: the telephone, the automobile, the airplane, the motion picture, rayon and the radio. Who shall say that inventions equally potent for social change will not exert comparable influence in the next forty years? The recent report, of the Sub-

committee on Technology to the National Resources Committee, published last June, suggests the far reaching social effects which may follow further development of the mechanical cotton picker, air conditioning equipment, plastics, the photo-electric cell, artificial cotton and woolen-like fibres made of cellulose, synthetic rubber, prefabricated houses, television, facsimile transmission, the automobile trailer, gasoline produced from coal, steep-flight aircraft planes and tray agriculture. Other inventions no doubt lie just over the horizon.

In this distraught ever-changing world of ours it is small wonder that men look with admiration at our colleges and universities, impressed as never before by their longevity, as compared with existing systems of government, by their matchless role as preservers of the heritage of the race, and by the opportunity that is theirs for the development of leaders. None of us who has a part in an ancient foundation like this, with its roots sunk deep in the national life, can fail to feel comforted and sustained and heartened by the sense of its permanence and its stability. Yet who of us can assert with confidence that American education today is adequately preparing college graduates for life in so rapidly changing a world? "Democracy," as John Dewey says, "has to be born anew every generation and education is the midwife." Are we teachers worthy of the role? Will the members of the Class of 1941 leave this valley better equipped than were the members of the Class of 1914 to master the problems of the business cycle, of democracy, and of the maintenance of peace? My own college generation failed to solve these problems, in part at least because we were inadequately prepared. What can we do in our colleges and universities now to help the next generation to do better?

We must attack this problem, it seems to me, along the whole front, grappling with both the content and the techniques of education. Before we come to grips with either, let us frankly confess that we cannot "educate" any of our students in four years. We can only help them along on the road of self-education. In his annual report for 1937, President Conant justly observes:

> "It seems to me a hopeless task to provide a complete and finished liberal education suitable to this century by four years of college work. The only worthwhile liberal education today is one which is a continuing process going on throughout life . . . . Whether a liberal education has been a success or failure should be measured by the student's breadth of vision fifteen or twenty years after graduation. Has the smattering acquired in college worn thinner with each succeeding year? If so, it has been of little value. Or has it provided a basis for continued intellectual and spiritual growth? In this case it has been the most significant part of the college training . . . ."

President Hutchins has put his finger on a major weakness of our educational system when he points to the lack of a common culture, shared by all educated men, in the sense that the culture of the Middle Ages was common to medieval scholars. Accepting the desirability of such a common culture for the world today, may we not doubt whether Mr. Hutchins has found it when he suggests the study of metaphysics

as the desired basis? Have we here the touchstone for the problems of a changing world? President Conant says no, and advocates the study of American civilization as the common ground on which educated Americans should be prepared to meet. This to my mind is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. To prepare himself to keep his feet in a world of change and to attack its problems as a leader or indeed as an intelligent follower, the American student must, it seems to me, familiarize himself to some degree with both the content and the methods of the whole range of the social sciences. He must understand the contemporary world in the light of its past, and bring to its study the techniques of the economist and of the political scientist. If we learn from history how previous generations have stumbled and blundered along on their way, we equip ourselves to judge aright the panaceas which are presented to us by self-constituted saviors of society who tell us how to share the wealth and make every man a king. Since change is the essence of society, social machinery must constantly be readjusted to meet the needs of a changing world. But it makes all the difference in the world whether these adjustments are made by men who understand the machine, or by quacks whose sole stock in trade consists of promises and platitudes. There are guides of the latter sort who would say that the best rule for navigation would be to burn the charts and unship the compass, install a microphone and man the ship with publicity men. To some of us who are grounded in the social studies, these seem no sane sailing directions. We would prefer to say of our reforms, what Burke said of his in 1780, "I heaved the lead every inch of the way I made."

I am not stressing the importance of the social sciences because they are neglected at Williams, for they are not. Our enrollment in courses in those fields is high, and the instruction is generally excellent. My purpose is to defend the social sciences from two different attacks: first, from that which comes from champions of the natural sciences and the humanities, who denounce the social scientists for alleged imperialism, for "taking in too much territory," and monopolizing the student's attention; and second, from that which comes from reactionaries, who fear that "youthful minds" will be unsettled by instruction in such controversial subjects.

Williams College has a great literary tradition, of which we are all proud. Let us hope that it may ever be preserved, and strengthened. I wish no diminution of the number of students who "major" or concentrate in the literary fields. But they, as well as those whose primary interest is elsewhere, cannot, it seems to me, be deemed well prepared for life in the world we know and in the world we can reasonably anticipate, unless they have laid — as most of them are at least in part seeking to do at Williams today — a firm enough foundation by work in the social studies in their undergraduate years to permit them to continue such studies in later life, not necessarily in a graduate school, but in any and every walk of life they may choose to follow.

Here, you may say, a college or university treads on dangerous ground when it directs increased attention to the social sciences. Do not those often deal with controversial subjects, which excite the wrath of strong pressure groups? Are not these just the topics over which men wax hot, and reactionary legislatures seek to establish statutory control? Yes, that is true, but they must none the less be taught and dis-

cussed in our classrooms and on our campuses unless the colleges and universities are to surrender their leadership to the newspaper, the radio and the propagandist.

We must admit that, in these fields, it is sometimes difficult to maintain cool, temperate discussion, or to find general agreement either as to the direction chosen or as to the rate of progress. Conservatives may cry out that we are rushing down a steep place into the sea. To radicals the procession may appear, at the very same moment, a column of laggards. President Wilson once remarked that—

> "It would seem a waste of time to point out that ancient distinction — between mere change and improvement. Yet there is a class of mind that is prone to confuse them. We have had political leaders whose conception of greatness was to be forever frantically doing something, — it mattered little what; restless, vociferous men, without sense of the energy of concentration, knowing only the energy of succession. Now, life does not consist of eternally running to a fire. There is no virtue in going anywhere unless you will gain something by being there. The direction is just as important as the impetus of motion."

That many difficulties beset the path of the social scientist none of us would deny. Yet the danger or hardship of a route is no good reason to abandon it, if it seems the best way to the goal we must attain. And if man is to achieve greater social control over the problems of the business cycle, of democracy and of peace, this route through the social sciences must be explored, and explored in freedom.

Academic freedom has been destroyed in Russia, Germany and Italy and attacked too often for comfort in our own country. In 1935, "seventy-five gag laws of various sorts were enacted by the legislatures of forty-four states and in two of these states the mere utterance of opinion was defined as criminal." The variety of restraints on freedom is legion. Some of them are no doubt relatively harmless. In the terms of the prize established by one of our most distinguished graduates, David A. Wells of the Class of 1847, for an essay on one of certain broad subjects in economics, the donor stipulated that no essay should be considered "that in any way advocates or defends the spoliation of property under form or process of law; or the restriction of commerce in times of peace by legislation except for moral or sanitary purposes, or the enactment of usury laws, or the impairment of contracts by the debasement of coins, or the issue and use by Government of irredeemable notes or promises to pay intended to be used as currency, and as a substitute for money, or which defends the endorsement of such 'paper,' 'notes' and 'promises to pay' with the legal tender quality." It is one thing for the founder of a prize, for which no one is bound to compete, to set up an *index expurgatorius*. It would, on the other hand, be a grave infringement of academic freedom if the college itself, or the state or federal government should adopt such a list of prohibited doctrines and seek to exclude them from discussion. It is interesting to note, moreover, that some of the principles which were anathema to Mr. Wells have become accepted practice of our state or federal governments since his day.

The truth of the matter was well put by Justice Holmes in the Abrams case: "when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe

. . . that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas — that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That, at any rate, is the theory of our Constitution." In another dissenting opinion, in U. S. *v.* Schwimmer, Holmes declared: "if there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other it is the principle of free thought — not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate." That there were necessary limits to such freedom he frankly conceded, as in the Schenck case: "The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater and causing a panic." The line has been well drawn in a recent unanimous decision of the Supreme Court, in De Jonge *v.* Oregon:

> "These rights may be abused by using speech or press or assembly in order to incite to violence and crime. The people through their legislatures may protect themselves against that abuse. But the legislative intervention can find constitutional justification only by dealing with the abuse. The rights themselves must not be curtailed. The greater the importance of safeguarding the community from incitements to the overthrow of our institutions by force and violence, the more imperative is the need to preserve inviolate the constitutional rights of free speech, free press and free assembly in order to maintain the opportunity for free political discussion, to the end that government may be responsive to the will of the people and that changes, if desired, may be obtained by peaceful means. Therein lies the security of the Republic, the very foundation of constitutional government."

Let us deal with the problem of academic freedom on this sound and American basis. If we need an object lesson of the dangers of any other course, we have but to look to Russia, Italy or Germany to see the appalling effects of government control of thought and teaching. *Facilis descensus Averno.*

If freedom is assured some teacher will some day abuse it. That, of course, is part of the price of freedom. Chancellor Capen of the University of Buffalo, in a thoughtful address before the Association of American University Professors last December, referred to the "exhibitionists" and "mountebanks" in the academic world "who, to feed their own vanity, recklessly stake the profession's most precious and hardly won possession." These men in my opinion are few, and are not numbered in our ranks here. The problem they raise seems to me less important than the question of indoctrination, the danger that the teacher will seek to impose his own political and economic beliefs on his students.

Many men, of the most divergent social philosophies, are tempted to do just that. Some of them seek to use education to perpetuate the existing pattern of American life. Others, in the words of a celebrated manifesto, contend that it is the teacher's duty to prepare youth for life in a collectivist society. Still others seek in education a means to modify or reform the established system. Disliking both of the first two courses, I

should be inclined to take my stand with the third group, the moderate reformers. Yet neither I nor any other member of these three groups has the right to impose his own social creed on his students. The words of President Eliot's inaugural are as true today as they were in 1869 —

> "Philosophical subjects should never be taught with authority . . . . It is not the function of the teacher to settle philosophical and political controversies for the pupil, or even to recommend to him any one set of opinions as better than another. Exposition, not imposition, of opinions is the professor's part. The student should be made acquainted with all sides of these controversies, with the salient points of each system; he should be shown what is still in force of institutions or philosophies mainly outgrown, and what is new in those now in vogue. The very word 'education' is a standing protest against dogmatic teaching. The notion that education consists in the authoritative inculcation of what the teacher deems true may be logical and appropriate in a convent, or a seminary for priests, but it is intolerable in universities and public schools, from primary to professional."

The difficult question at once arises of how to get all important varieties of opinion adequately treated in the classroom. The problem is not as easy today as it was in earlier times. Looking back over a quarter-century of glorious achievement at Johns Hopkins, President Gilman declared in 1902:

> "Never have the political views of any teacher helped or hindered his preferment; nor have I any idea what would be the result of the party classification of our staff."

Since that date, however, conflicts of opinion have developed or deepened which make it questionable how adequately radical doctrines will be presented by a conservative teacher, or conservative opinions expounded by one "left of center." A demand has consequently arisen for a representation of various shades of thought in that section of a faculty which teaches the social sciences. This can be pushed to absurd extremes, as in the contention that of two men considered for promotion, or for retention on a departmental staff, the weaker must receive the palm because of his social philosophy. It is hard to say how far one should go in the representation on a faculty of different social views. Some progress down that road seems necessary, even though it involves a departure from Gilman's ideal.

The objective, of course, is to get a first-rate faculty, however we may define it. If he has such a faculty, a college president may say of it what one of Barrie's heroines says of feminine charm: "If you have it, you don't need to have anything else; and if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have."

If our teachers are to develop leaders with foresight and capacity enough to regulate the inevitable processes of change, with an eye to the right direction and a sense of the correct tempo, they must re-examine not merely the content of education but their educational techniques. On the assumption that we cannot "educate" a boy in four years we must foster and develop those techniques which will make him feel responsible

for his education while in college, and capable of continuing it throughout life. In simpler words, we must put it up to the boy. Mark Hopkins pointed out in his inaugural address more than a century ago that—

> "It is far easier for a teacher to generalize a class and give it a lesson to get by rote, and hear it said, and let it pass, than it is to watch the progress of individual minds and awaken interest, and answer objections, and explore tendencies, and, beginning with the elements, construct together with his pupils, so that they shall feel that they aid in it, the fair fabric of a science with which they shall be familiar from the foundation to the top stone."

Our success in doing this will largely depend on our ability to keep Williams small.

No one in our time has done so much to promote the idea of putting education up to the undergraduate as President Lowell. He instituted at Harvard the system of comprehensive examinations, the tutorial system, and the House plan. He made study fashionable and saw the percentage of candidates for honors among Harvard undergraduates rise from about fifteen to over forty. For the opportunity he gave me to learn something of these new methods as tutor, examiner, and master, and for the inspiration which came from working with him, I am profoundly grateful.

In the spirit voiced by Mark Hopkins, Williams, too, under President Garfield and President Dennett, has made notable progress by the development of honors course work and by the adoption of a system of comprehensive examinations which will go into effect this year. But much remains to be done by all colleges and universities in the way of equipping their students to steer themselves.

The most interesting recent development in this field is President Conant's experiment with extra-curricular study of American cultural history, based on a carefully chosen reading list and supplemented by short series of lectures open to the public and broadcasted by short-wave radio. If Harvard, Williams, Chicago, or any other institution will work out similar programs for extra-curricular work in the other social sciences, a student can lay the necessary broad foundations for later study in any of those fields in which he does not choose to take formal courses.

At Williams the enrollment in our courses in history, economics and political science is already large. In urging that all students familiarize themselves with all three of these subjects in their undergraduate years, I do not mean to raid the humanities and the natural sciences, or to increase the tendency, already strong, to "major" or concentrate in one of these fields. It is a general background for later study which I am advocating.

Man does not live by social studies alone. Nor is all life simply a series of adjustments to changed social conditions. Just as few Williams men leave this valley without a deep appreciation of the beauties of nature, let us hope that few will leave unaware of the rich cultural values of literature, music and the fine arts: and that some at least will go forth well equipped to carry on work in the natural sciences, whose astonishing development is perhaps the chief glory of our time.

At Williams we are not seeking to turn out men trained for a single specific career.

We are proud of the variety of ways in which our graduates have won distinction. We treasure the names of Whitney and of Bascom, of Garfield and of Stetson. Some day we hope to see another Charles Gross, who came to us a poor Jewish boy, graduated the first scholar of the Class of 1878, and became, next to Maitland, the greatest historian of his time in the field of English institutions. Some day we hope to see the like of Carroll Perry, whose radiant spirit brought joy to the whole Williams family, and whose passing leaves us in shadow.

Whether our seniors go on to graduate work in a university or technical school or enter at once the business world, their equipment here as "self-steerers" will serve them in good stead. Their success will depend as much on their character and will power as on the information they will have garnered here. Our techniques of education will be important, not merely as they promote the acquisition of information, but as they help to form character and train will power.

We are inheritors of a New England tradition many of whose prescriptions are too little heeded in our modern world. The old New England slogans, "eat it up," "wear it out," and "make it do," are too often forgotten in the age of mass production. The railroad and the automobile have made Williamstown a different place from what it was in 1855 when my grandfather, Robert John Carpenter, and his friend Franklin Carter, after graduating from Phillips Academy, rode on horseback to visit the college, and, impressed by its isolation, decided not to enroll here but to press on to New Haven.

If, despite the freedom and mobility of our modern life here, our undergraduates will only see how difficult and challenging life is going to be in the whirling world that lies before them, they will start as freshmen to discipline and prepare themselves for the tasks for which my generation has proved inadequate. Some parents will say, why hold up such a gloomy prospect? Are you thinking of making Williams so hard that it will lose the smiling aspect of what Mark Hopkins described as a "safe college," a place of "health and cheerful study and kind feelings and pure morals"?

Let me point out to these questioners that there is a marked difference in the way in which insecurity is regarded by the older members of the community and by the men under thirty. What to the old seems often a hateful and alarming thing is but an inspiring challenge to those who are beginning their career on the world's stage or who are only in their first stride towards their goal.

I have lived in too close contact with modern undergraduates to share the fears sometimes expressed that modern conditions have sapped their self-reliance, eaten out their fiber, or disqualified them for struggles as hard as those which their pioneer forebears faced with equanimity. No one who has lived through the depression in close touch with American university students could fail to be impressed with their courage, their readiness to adjust themselves to straitened circumstances, or their rejection of the shallow philosophy that the world owes them a living.

On the score of self-reliance, then, we have little to fear, though no grounds for complacency. When asked once how Harvard fared, President Eliot retorted that a healthy spirit of pessimism reigned in all departments. In this vein one may question whether the students on any campus have as intense a desire for self-mastery and as

marked singleness of purpose as that which characterizes those stars of track and field who have broken record after record in the past quarter of a century with monotonous regularity. When one thinks of the cultural lag which is so striking a feature of modern society, our inability to make the best use today of the new inventions and techniques which have been so rapidly devised, it is clear that the tempo of intellectual life in American colleges and universities, already notably quickened, must become still faster.

Will that make Jack a dull boy? Quite the contrary. Remember the consoling reflexion made by the late Lord Balfour in his Rectorial Address of 1887 at St. Andrews: "True dullness is seldom acquired. It is a natural grace, the manifestations of which, however modified by education, remain in substance the same."

Man's capacity for intellectual growth is not fixed. By no instrument can we look into his eye and predict the day of his intellectual death, any more than we can determine the height to which he may jump or vault. Though no man, by taking thought, can add a cubit to his stature, any man, whether he possesses a Phi Beta Kappa key or not, can by self-discipline speed up his intellectual processes. On the more intelligent rests the greater responsibility to do so. The problem is, as it always was, up to the boy. Our chief task is to make him see it, and to help him to draw the necessary inferences. There is no place in American education, therefore, for those that lack faith in the students. "Colleges," said Emerson, "can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame."

Just because youth with flaming hearts will furnish us leadership which combines courage — readiness to strike out on new courses after sounding the way — with ability to scrutinize new proposals with a mind stored with the wisdom of the past and trained in the best analytical methods of the present, there is hope for this and every other free nation. In the words which Thucydides put in the mouth of Pericles, they, like Athens, will owe their greatness "to men with the fighter's daring, the wise man's understanding of his duty, and the good man's self-discipline in its performance."