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H O N E S T Y

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A BACCALAUREATE DISCOURSE
DELIVERED JUNE 17, 1906





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Each graduating class as it steps forth from this hall into the world finds itself confronted with problems peculiar to its time. In this hurrying American life no one year presents exactly the same phases as another to those who embark upon its tides.

One of the most striking characteristics of the past year in this country, it will be generally agreed, is the wide-spread outbreak of dishonesty in high places. Men holding the most important fiduciary trusts and receiving exorbitant salaries for their positions have proved criminally false to their trusts. United States senators have been convicted of gross frauds upon the government. Great corporations, rendered almost omnipotent by their vast aggregation of capital, have unscrupulously used their power to inflict great hardships on the common people who were their helpless victims. Bank officers in their greed have wrecked the institutions committed to their care and cheated the widow and the orphan out of their scanty possessions. As our daily newspapers have for months come freighted with the stories of these iniquities, we have been shocked and often driven almost to despondency while we asked whether honesty had fled from the earth, and whether any career is possible for an honorable man.

But fortunately as we turn our eyes away from

these criminals to the great mass of the common people, a brighter picture greets the eye. Everywhere we see the most gratifying manifestations of the moral soundness of our countrymen at large. They share to the full our indignation at the perpetrators of the crimes we have named, and at the misdemeanors of the political corruptionists who have plundered some of our principal cities and grown fat on the spoils of parties. With an energy which makes our hearts tingle with delight we have seen them dethroning bosses who have been for years in power. On all hands they are calling for the enactment of laws that will prevent the intolerable abuses from which they have suffered and for the vigorous and unsparing prosecution of rascals of high and of low degree. A more sane and wholesome state of public feeling has never been seen. When one looks into the faces of these honest and stalwart supporters of the right, one need not doubt whether in their company there is a career for an honorable man.

And furthermore have we not all felt new faith in the virtue of our nation, as during the last few weeks we have seen the extraordinary manifestations of sympathy and generosity called forth by the great calamity in California. From every town and hamlet, from the homes of the poorest as well as of the rich the contributions for the needy have poured in with such profusion that it seems that there is no heart in all this wide land too cold to be unmoved by the sight of suffering. We cannot believe that such a people is given over to iniquity.

So the young graduate finds himself between two fires. On the one hand now that the passion for getting rich is at a height before unknown and is so generally prevalent that he can hardly be expected to escape it altogether, he is surrounded by men of culture and social position who are yielding to its power, sacrificing character and risking reputation in the unscrupulous chase after wealth. Temptations and tempters beset him on every side. Examples of prominent but unscrupulous

men appeal to him daily and test his virtue as in a furnace of fire.

On the other hand popular indignation at dishonesty and civic fraud is also at a height before unknown. The public press daily harries and hunts down these unworthy officials and capitalists who have despoiled their neighbors and holds them up to public scorn and contempt. The courts are binding some of them, who have held high places in society, with the gyves of the law and sheriffs are haling them to penitentiaries. The halls of legislation are ringing with the cries of the people for laws to protect them against the wily schemes of such men as have in the past plundered them with impunity. And great hearted benevolence is flooding the Pacific coast with gifts of unparalled generosity.

If here and now I should ask you with which of these opposing parties you sympathize, your answer would be ready and would be right. If I should ask you which one you purpose to join for life, your answer would be equally prompt and also right. Youth and young manhood in the American university, thank God, still with few exceptions cherishes pure and lofty ideals of duty and life. Perhaps, however, you may have already observed exceptions enough to lead you to listen with patience to a few timely cautions.

Let me warn you that you can hardly realize the strength of the temptations which will assail you in actual life. Inexperienced, dwelling among strangers, possessed of so scanty means that every step forward, even the shortest, is of vital importance, that even the slenderest opportunity must be seized with avidity, you may find yourself surrounded with men of talent, breeding, education and experience, who with the stings of wit, ridicule your scruples and tell you that if you are to compete with others in business or in professional life and hold your own, you must use the same tools that they use. For a time you may not yield to their ridicule or to their advice. But as you see some of them no more

gifted and no better trained than you, but following their unscrupulous policy, pass you in the race for wealth or professional success or political preferment, there may be hours when your faith in honor and honesty as a rule of life in such a world as this will be rudely shaken. Unless every fibre in your soul is firm for the right, you will be subject to tests of which you have little conception now. The least yielding to a stream of pernicious influences will open the way to the devastating torrent, which will sweep away the very foundations of your character.

We will not stop to speak of contemptible tricks which may attract the common pettifogger. But what about the allurements of large fees when as a lawyer you have so risen in reputation for sharpness that you are bribed to find some hole in the law through which your client may creep when you know that he richly deserves to be convicted, or when you are retained to shape legislation by artful means so that your client can with impunity carry on his business in dishonorable and dishonest ways.

What is to befall the physician who has taken his Hippocratic oath as he set out on his career and has made eloquent speeches on professional honor and obligations and after a few years of hard work crowned with meagre success sees the road to wealth opened by a resort to quackery or nostrums useless or harmful, a road on which hundreds have preceded him. Will he try to soothe his conscience with the familiar remark that fools must be treated according to their folly, and that there is nothing too extraordinary for some men to believe on two subjects, namely, medical theories and religious beliefs. For physicians and religious teachers deliberately to stake their success on an appeal to these infirmities by practices and teachings which they know to have no foundation in truth history shows to have been discouragingly common in the past, even in the case of men whose early life would have led us to expect better

things from them. It may not be amiss to call your attention now to the danger posts on your path.

Not a few of you are liable to be drawn into newspaper life. The pursuit is most honorable and useful, but furnishes stringent tests of character. To suffer one's self to be led by high remuneration or by the dictates of party leaders to take up the advocacy of doctrines or policies, in which one does not believe, is a most demoralizing habit. Life is not worth having if it is to be maintained by systematic hypocrisy. If one is proprietor or manager and allows his counting room to control his columns, especially if he surrenders his space to pernicious advertisements, he may plead the example of alas! too many papers which have large circulation, but he must remember that he forfeits the approbation of his pure and right-minded readers.

Many of you will be called into the activities of political life. It is a matter for congratulation that an increasing number of educated men, actuated by the highest and most patriotic motives, are willing to give a portion of their time and energy to public affairs. If our republican system of government is to succeed, it must have the services of such men, who seek the public good rather than mere personal advantage to themselves. Therefore I urge you to do your full part in all legitimate ways to secure the enactment and execution of beneficent laws, and to a reasonable extent to accept such responsible positions as your fellow-citizens may invite you to. But it should be remembered that office-holding, and still more office-seeking, is not the only way to be of service to one's party or to the country. Many a man who never leaves the ranks of the private citizen is of more service to his party and to his country by the conscientious and vigilant discharge of the duties of citizenship than his neighbor who is inert, unless he is chosen to some office. Illustrations of this truth are familiar to every careful observer of political life.

But those of you who aspire to, or who obtain

without special effort on your part, political station, are likely to find yourself exposed to temptation which will test your virtue of what sort it is. In order to secure your election you will find yourself urged by some of your friends who have had more experience than you to adopt measures at which your conscience or your sense of propriety and decency revolts. Once elected, you will find yourself besieged by designing men to favor legislation which on its face appears innocent, but which really opens the way for them to accomplish nefarious ends. You may soon learn what is the tyranny of party, if on good scruples you hesitate to follow its bidding on any measure. You will soon be taught that if you expect any of the beneficent acts which you have proposed to be adopted you must be prepared to vote for certain measures desired by other men which you do not approve. You will be asked to put your conscience or your judgment into the market for a trade. I say nothing of the grosser modes of attack on your conscience or your judgment by bribery or promises of promotion, which I trust your reputation for honesty will make it impossible for them to think of in your case, although you may witness it in other cases. But the possibilities I have named indicate of what stuff you should be made to meet with a clean heart the perils to which you may be exposed. It is clear that a professional office-seeker, who regards the procuring and retention of office as his main object, is feebly equipped to meet them. He is vulnerable at a thousand points. He speedily loses his independence, if not his self-respect. This is why young graduates should, if possible, avoid accepting clerkships in the departments at Washington. They there earn just enough to make them content with that sort of life, and if they have not much energy they remain stranded there all their days and end their career just where they began.

I have not pointed out the temptations which may beset you in the various callings in life to dishearten you,

but only to caution you. I take an optimistic, not a pessimistic view of life in our nation. The lawyer of fair ability, of industry, and of character is sure to be recognized and respected in due time. The physician of intelligence, of fidelity to his patients, of pleasing address and of good morals is certain to be in demand and to bind to him the families he serves by the dearest ties.

The editor who loves veracity more than sensationalism and purity in his columns more than the ill-gotten gains of salacious advertisements is assured of influence in a decent community. The man on whom political office is thrust by his fellow-citizens because of his intellectual and moral worth dwells in an atmosphere quite above the vulgar and nauseous temptations which captivate the professional office-seeker, and when he finishes his career leaves an honored name behind him. The path to a successful and worthy future is open to every one of you. To most of you great wealth and great fame may be denied. But a life of usefulness, a fair share of this world's reward and a stainless reputation are within the reach of every one of you. And with these assured, why should not all be content today and go forth with brave and cheerful hearts to face the world?

The present reaction of indignation against the public iniquities which have recently flooded the land have borne the great mass of our people on to a moral height which they have seldom attained. Never was there a time when a young man who wishes to dedicate his life to honor and truth was more certain to find a public welcoming him heartily to their service. You are embarking on your lives when the tide of righteousness is rising to its flood. Plunge boldly in and stake your all on the triumph of truth. Let us see a whole generation of the young pledging their lives to honesty and nobility, and the world will with shouts of rejoicing stretch out their arms to welcome them. Especially would we rejoice to see them pouring out of these halls and plunging into the

battle of life bearing aloft the white shield of honor and looking with confidence for victory.

It seems almost superfluous to say that, if he who is to lead the worthy life is called to be honest with men, still more is he called to be honest with God. Thou shalt not only love thy neighbor as thyself but thou shalt first of all love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. But how many there are who, if challenged, will confess that they have not given up the belief in the Fatherhood of God, and who yet live as though they neither had nor sought a close relationship with Him. Receiving all bounties from Him, they yet live as though they had no relationship except with their fellowmen. They may strive to be not only honorable in their dealings with others, but even to be generous and philanthropic. But so far as we can discover, their souls give no sign of running out with gratitude towards the Giver of all good gifts to them. Some justify their course by maintaining that God neither asks nor desires anything of them except that they shall deal justly and kindly with their fellows. No doubt that is well pleasing in His sight and must form a part of every well-ordered life.

But if we are to take the example and teachings of Jesus as our guide, this is by no means the whole of our privilege or of our duty. This loving Father is nigh unto us, even in our hearts, if we will admit Him. He delights to have us make known our requests to Him in sincere petition. He is pleased to have us commune with Him and seek for his blessing upon us and evince our gratitude to Him by word and by deed. Not that he asks to be placated by the blood of goats and of rams, but that he cannot be a Father without desiring the sincere and filial love of his children, and that love cannot exist without seeking and finding some form of expression.

But are there not some before me who would be slow to admit that they do not cherish filial love, yet who are slow to manifest it? This is a period when there are so many questionings concerning creed and dogma, when

so many forms of expressing belief venerable by centuries of use have become emptied of their meaning to some of you, when your perceptions of your relations to God have been so dimmed by confusing discussions in philosophy, in science, in theology, that you are hesitant about making affirmations on religious themes. All this we can understand. But after all is there anything puzzling in the simple relation of you the child to God, your loving Father. And is there any valid excuse for your failing to recognize this relation sincerely, honestly, gratefully, in your daily walk and conversation.

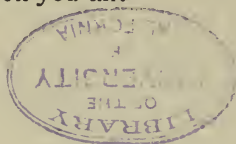
You are about to step out into a world, of which you know but little. No one can see what lies upon his pathway for even a day. The loving Father waits at the threshold which you are to cross today to take you by the hand and help you on in your journey. No learning which you have gathered, no skill which you have acquired, no friendship which you have won, can take the place of the gracious help which He is ready to bestow on every one who opens his heart to His divine approaches and honestly trusts to His blessed guidance. As we part here on this threshold today, may I not ask you to take this simple question with you into life, nay through life, "Is it so important for you to be absolutely honest in any other relation of your soul as in your relation to your Heavenly Father?"

My friends I should be sorry to have you listen to these parting words of mine without assuring you that the parting with you of myself and your other teachers is not merely formal and ceremonious. You have won during your years of association with us and will ever retain our affectionate interest in your welfare. We trust that it will be our good fortune to retain some pleasant place in your memories.

This year has been unusually calamitous to the University Senate. During the last few months three of our professors have been suddenly snatched from us by death: dePont, that charming gentleman, of the noblest

French breeding and refinement; Pattengill, whose thorough instruction in the Greek tongue formed an epoch in the intellectual life of every one of you who had the good fortune to receive it; Russell, the brave explorer and charming writer whose works have carried his name and that of the University throughout the scientific world, these spring months have robbed us of them all.

These events cannot but remind us, even in these joyous days, of the uncertainty of the future even for you in your vigor and strength. But we wish to assure every one of you, whether Providence grants you a longer or a brief career, we shall follow you in all your work with the warmest sympathy and with the most ardent hopes for your highest success. The strength and the prosperity of the University are found in the character and the lives of her sons and daughters. Remember that you go forth with this high commission, by your careers to help build the University of the future. Therefore be assured that as she parts with you this week, her choicest benedictions fall upon you all.



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