CULTIVATION OR CONFUSION

The 1937 Commencement Address

By President Alexander G. Ruthven

Man finds himself today in a curious predicament. For many centuries he has searched for knowledge in the belief that the truth would set him free and bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

The belief has persisted, although, from its inception there have been doubting Thomases to be confounded. A leader in his generation could once write:

> The world itself now bears witness to its approaching end by the evidence of its failing powers. There is not so much rain in winter for fertilizing the seeds, nor in summer is there so much warmth for ripening them. The springtime is no longer so mild, nor the autumn so rich in fruit. Less marble is quarried from the exhausted mountains, and the dwindling supplies of gold and silver show that the mines are worked out and the impoverished veins of metal diminish from day to day. The peasant is failing and disappearing from the fields, the sailor at sea, the soldier in the camp, uprightness in the forum, justice in the court, concord in friendships, skill in the arts, discipline in morals. Can anything that is old preserve the same powers that it had in the prime and vigour of its youth? It is inevitable that whatever is tending downwards to decay and approaches its end must decrease in strength, like the setting sun and the waning moon, and the dying tree and the failing stream. This is the sentence passed on the world; this is God's law: that all that has risen should fall and that all that has grown should wax old, and that strong things should become weak and great things should become small, and that when they have been weakened and diminished they should come to an end.

But this was written more than seventeen hundred years ago, and the world still exists, though the Roman world of which Cyprian was a member was even in his day disintegrating and did come to an end.

And that day has been followed, at last, by our own, in which man has succeeded astonishingly in accumulating information about himself and his world. As a result he has discarded many fears and superstitions, eased the struggle for existence for an increasing proportion of the population, and drawn geographical and racial elements closer together.

But the goal of his great effort has not been attained—the advent of the Kingdom of God on earth is still delayed, and paradoxical as it may seem, the knowledge which was to place human brotherhood on a high plane now appears to be equally potent and quite likely to debase it to a low level.

Old evils persist in a new world

Ability and inclination to use information for the purposes for which it should be accumulated in a social organization have increased unsatisfactorily if at all, and an anti-social individualism and an intense nationalism remain to retard the growth of social consciousness and social justice. Likewise the Marxist belief in the "Last Judgment on Capitalism and the coming of the proletariat Messiah," with its subconsciously religious power, is tremendously attractive for countless thousands at the present

moment. Christianity fails "in modern times to grapple sincerely and wholeheartedly with the social evils for which the proletariat is right in seeking a religious solution."

Existence continues to mean in large part the making of a living, a striving for the flesh pots, a selfish utilization of discoveries and natural resources; it represents the perversion of the individualistic law of the survival of the fittest into a philosophy of favoritism for the most ruthless. There appears either the Marxist effort to make the whole of life subservient to economic ends or the individualist effort to free the economic order from the moral law of justice and the spiritual law of charity.

Increased leisure is largely wasted in frivolous pastimes rather than utilized for study, reflection, and service, and is thus directly and indirectly associated with intellectual dishonesty, cultural degeneracy, and spiritual bankruptcy.

Human efforts to direct social progress are largely ineffectual

Education which should, to paraphrase the observation of a great thinker, discipline the feelings, restrain the passions, inspire pure and worthy motives, instill a profound religious attitude, and inculcate a pure morality, finds itself stultified by the persistence and encouragement of the brute characteristics, to which are added, as a product of soft living, mental inertia, and love of luxury.

Teaching, which should be concerned principally with the development of the mind, is betrayed by its own disciples; the schools, by insistence upon so-called practical training, seek quick returns in dollars and cents, at the expense of cultural growth.

Religion, whose task and triumph are to direct knowledge to its proper uses and thus "make men and nations true and just and upright in all their dealings," is everywhere institutionalized and submerged in organization.

Religious instruction is mostly limited to the preaching of ideals, as if an understanding of man's place could be of real value when detached from the practice of the principles of communal living.

Research, the creation of new knowledge, man's effort to arrive at true values, is inadequately encouraged and supported except in those areas where results can be appropriated by the specially privileged.

The diminishing of geographic isolation by scientific achievements, which should bring mutual understanding and sympathy, is sharpening competition, and, as a consequence, promoting misunderstandings, engendering hatreds, and encouraging murder on a scale never anticipated by the most atrabilious of prophets.

The composite human mind is in confusion worse confounded and stands bewildered and dismayed as it views accumulated knowledge developing into a Frankenstein which may easily destroy its author.

Evidently we are not prone to put into practice what we have been taught

With ease human thinking deduces that since "God is not the author of confusion" the present distress must be attributable to the failure of the species to grow in wisdom as it increases in knowledge and material possessions.

Not easily can the individual be led to see many of his specific difficulties as the combined result of ease of living and a failure to learn, integrate, and apply the teachings of wise men, even though the great truths which have become a choice heritage of the race are now substantiated by information and do not need to rest solely upon faith, fear, or authority.

From the old Pyramid texts to the modern philosophic and religious writings, we have been taught that man needs not bread alone but also beauty and brotherhood.

Great teachers have pointed out that while bread is the staff of life, worldly "wealth is like a viper, which is harmless if a man knows how to take hold of it; but

if he does not, it will twine round his hand and bite him." They have often told us that the love of beauty and the understanding of brotherhood are the products of the cultivated mind, the developed and refined mind, the mind trained in the use of its own powers. They have explained to us that, since man is both his life history and all of his relations to his environment and since only through "social organization can the intelligent individual be provided with the conditions in which he can make his contribution to social welfare and human destiny," culture is incomplete unless it "relates knowledge to the great values and ends of life, and is reflected in social attitudes," in short, it is incomplete without religion and spiritual growth.

Reliable observers have noted for us that, while aptitudes should be cultivated in an organized society, specialization becomes overspecialization when training is narrowed to the point where the individual is prevented from performing all of the functions which are his as a social unit.

Finally, today a few voices crying in the wilderness warn us that the inadequacies which beset current communal life are due to a paucity of cultured minds and a consequent widespread lack of perspective, poise, and appreciation of fundamental human needs.

The truth is we all too often fail to realize the distinction between the power to stretch and the power to grow. We are complacent about our growth and dissatisfied with the portion of things which we can grasp. "Cultural progress has been strangely external to the personality, and therefore of very little real cultural significance. Take away temptation and moral character is certain to break all records in apparent virtue; surround a person with beautiful objects, and his taste will improve; repeat a large number of facts, and he will know a great deal; but all three actions, though they help, will not make a moral character, a cultured personality, nor a wise man. The good, the true, and the beautiful have to be achieved within the person, they have to be striven for by freely-willed and freely-wanted practice."

There is needed a realistic concept of culture

If our lack of success in advancing other than the material aspect of our civilization and our fears for the future may be attributed in part to failure to learn and spread the great truths which we have been taught, and in part to our inefficiency in developing the powers and personal traits of the individual, they are also a consequence of a reluctance to appreciate true learning as a function of experimental living.

The definition and refinement of objectives are intrinsic to spirituality, but the spiritual must be fed on knowledge in the intelligent mind and must be treated as a concomitant of the practical if it is to be fruitful of results.

The skilled hand and the cultured mind may not be separated as individual qualifications for world citizenship.

Culture, the product of a liberal education, adorns the mind and develops a love of beauty, but more fundamentally, when reflected in practical living, it is a motivating force in human ecology and a necessary factor in civilization.

The cure for our confusion, disillusionment, and apprehension is too simple, too obvious, and too hard to take to be appealing.

The remedy indicated by our ills is not extreme regimentation, not material progress alone, not less specialization in itself, not even the elaboration of idealities, but rather the immediate adoption of a realistic concept of culture.

The responsibility is plainly upon this and succeeding generations to develop, through lifelong effort, broadly trained minds: minds which refuse to divorce ideals from reality, minds able and determined to meet situations as they arise by applying knowledge in the best interests of the many

rather than to the advantage of the few.

Only cultured minds at work, if anything, can be trusted to prevent social injustice from turning back the clock which is recording the growth of human solidarity and a world civilization.

Members of the Class of 1937: Yours is a great challenge.

"The whole world is burning, thirsting for transformation, seeking a new and better life," and, consequently, is malleable as it never has been before. We advise that you may have a new heaven and a new earth if you will strike while the iron is hot. You must, however, strike intelligently, using every bit of knowledge you have and can gain of the nature of the materials; strike with all the skill you can develop through continued study, and strike with thought always of the pattern which has been drawn for mankind through the ages.

The specific charge of your instructors is this: Do not accept the cheap and confused designs for living offered by the modern world, nor cling to the individualistic plan outmoded with the dawn of conscience, but rather follow the advice of a great teacher: "Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are of good report," think on these things and practice them.

DISCOVERY

The day I heard that you were dead
I fashioned you a song.
It was to be a solemn dirge
And long.

Schooled only in bewilderment
And ignorant of grief
I made a song as lissom
As a leaf.

Although I called aloud to death
In bitterness and pain
The song I made was light
As April rain.

I knew you as a laughing girl
Amid the careless years . . .
Your laughter echoed strangely
Through my tears.

Cruelly bemused I fell into
A dreadful wondering.
Forgotten were the chosen words
That sing.

And as I saw my dancing lines
Grow curiously blurred,
I found the dreadful meaning
Of a word.

ELIZABETH ALLEN